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THOUGHTS ON HELL

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THOUGHTS ON HELL

A Study in Eschatology

BY

VICTOR MORTON



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P R E F A C E

THE publication of these "Thoughts" is prompted by several considerations. Experience and observation have convinced me that the orthodox doctrine of Hell presents to many minds, otherwise favourably disposed towards Christianity, one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of a whole-hearted and intelligent acceptance of the truths of the Christian Creed. I am equally convinced that the compromise offered by modern liberal theology, or indeed any attempt to explain the doctrine away, is not only an outrage on common sense, but is calculated to increase

the intellectual and moral difficulty a thousand-fold.

To very many persons the philosophical and theological works dealing with the subject are either unknown, or they are, by reason of their technical form, and for other obvious reasons, inaccessible. Comparatively few are acquainted with the unexpected disclosures of modern psychical science, and the light which these are calculated to throw upon the mysteries enveloping the future life. They are, therefore, scarcely in a position to think the matter out clearly and dispassionately, and to weigh the considerations which can, in fairness, be urged in favour of the truth of the doctrine.

Having personally experienced the full force of the moral difficulty which belief in the doctrine of Hell involves, and having given a good deal of study and time to the matter, I felt that a short statement of the views arrived at, and of what really careful thinkers have written on the subject, might prove

suggestive and helpful to other perplexed and troubled minds.

The subject is one which does not readily lend itself to a popular treatment, and the ideas expressed are therefore necessarily somewhat crude and fragmentary in their form and character. They may, nevertheless, induce some, who, for one reason or another have rejected the doctrine, to study the subject with greater care, and to reconsider their conclusions. They will, at any rate, help them to see that there are better and more solid grounds for believing the doctrine than is commonly supposed. I have, wherever possible, given the views of well-known scientific and literary authorities rather than my own.

V. M.

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THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF HELL

IT is admitted by all really fair and unbiassed minds that the orthodox doctrine of Hell is a vital and necessary part of the Christian Revelation. The evidence in its favour is so exceptionally clear and conclusive, that there can be no reasonable ground for doubt or choice in the matter. Nor is there any legitimate way of effecting an honourable compromise with modern rationalistic thought and interpretation. The doctrine is not only taught by Christ Himself in the plainest and most unmistakable terms of which human language is capable, but it underlies and is implied in the entire system of thought developed in the New Testament, and may be said to be its very basis and foundation. Without the conception of a future and per-

manent state of punishment consequent upon a life of sin and rebellion against God, the Christian scheme of Redemption has neither consistency nor coherence, and its most central doctrines become unreasonable and incomprehensible.

This fact is, and must be, clear to all honest students of this great subject whose judgment has not been perverted by sophistical reasoning, and who are determined to be loyal to fact and to truth. For it does not really matter whether the subject be studied in the original Greek of the New Testament, or in one of the more modern English versions of the Bible : whether allowance be made for the language of illustration and metaphor, or for the most recent discoveries of the higher critic. It is not a question of particular words or phrases or expressions, but of great ideas and principles ; of an element which is intimately bound up with the entire thought structure of the Sacred Writings, and which pervades and permeates its every part.

It is instructive and significant to observe that this transparent fact has never been

questioned by the sceptic and the unbeliever, however strongly he may have opposed the doctrine itself on moral grounds. "It has been reserved for the accommodating, shallow Christians of modern days, who wish to reject it without abandoning their belief in Christianity, to throw dust in other people's eyes, as well as their own, by obscuring what is really a very simple matter with ingenious—though it may be unconscious—sophistries." But it may be doubted whether any permanent service has thus been rendered to the cause of Christianity and of truth. Such literary tricks may impress the superficial few; they have no weight whatever with really logical and consistent thinkers. Their worthlessness is bound to be detected sooner or later. For it is impossible, by any method or artifice, to get rid of the plain and striking statements of Holy Writ. Such words as are employed by Christ Himself in St Matthew xxv. 41, 46; in St Mark iii. 29; and ix. 47, 48; Rev. xiv. 11; xvi. 10, 11; and xxi. 8 remain, as Sir James Stephen rightly said, "the most terrific words which have ever been spoken in

the ears of man," and they will retain their force and import however ingenious the attempt to empty them of their meaning. In such a matter as this it is surely a dangerous thing for the mind to seek refuge in a false security, and to allow the impression to take root that, by ignoring the unwelcome truth, it has ceased to exist for us, or that we have escaped the responsibilities which its recognition entails. Our duty is rather to face it bravely and, God helping us, to seek for safe and legitimate and God-appointed means of escape.

It is assumed by very large numbers of intelligent persons that the orthodox conception of Hell is inconsistent with reason and with cultivated thought, and that it has been rejected by the larger number of really thoughtful and liberal theologians. Loose statements to this effect are frequently made from the pulpit, and they would almost seem to confirm this very general view of the matter. But a greater error cannot be conceived. The most cultured and enlightened theologians of both ancient and modern times have explicitly stated it as their

most earnest conviction that the doctrine of Hell is a vital and integral part of the New Testament teaching, and that the only safe and honest thing is to acknowledge the fact.

St Augustine, one of the greatest and most learned fathers of the Christian Church, says : “What a thing it is to account eternal punishment to be a fire of long duration (merely), and eternal life to be without end, since Christ comprised both in that very same place, in one and the same sentence, saying : ‘These shall go into eternal punishment, but the just into life everlasting.’ If both are eternal, either both must be understood to be lasting with an end, or both perpetual without end. For like is related to like : on the one side eternal punishment, on the other eternal life. But to say in one and the same sentence, life eternal shall be without end, punishment eternal and Hell have an end, were too absurd ; whence, since the eternal life of the saints shall be without end, punishment, eternal too, shall doubtless have no end to those whose it shall be.” *

* “*De Civitate Dei*,” xxi. 23.

Passaglia, a renowned theologian, and a man well qualified to speak with authority on this subject, well observed : “Either St John and Isaiah used terms expressive of eternal duration, or else there is no such term to be found.”

“Every form of words employed in Scripture to describe everlastingness,” says Dr Angus, “our Lord and His Apostles employ to describe the state of those who die in sin and disbelief.” Or, as Mr Oxenham, a Roman Catholic writer, expresses it : “The most uncompromising revelation of this awful truth, which no rationalising sophistry can effectually obscure, issued from the lips of the Incarnate Word Himself.”

In a sermon on the “Spirits in Prison,” the late Dr Vaughan, Master of the Temple, a learned and liberal theologian said : “I cannot get rid of three words—certainly not of the three things meant by them—from my Bible. I may write ‘Hell,’ ‘Hades,’ in one place, and ‘Gehenna,’ in another. I may write ‘damnation’ into ‘condemnation,’ because wicked men have made the old form a profanity, and I may turn ‘everlasting’ into ‘eternal,’ if I can thereby

better express the idea of duration of being, without involving the idea of succession of time. But what then? Are the things gone because you have re-christened them?"

Such are the views of some really careful and learned thinkers on this great subject who, we may suppose, were fully alive to the moral difficulties which their conclusions involved. And if this be so, what are we to say of those modern pseudo-theologians who, to please the spirit of the age, attack the very central stronghold of the Faith, even at the risk of discrediting Christianity itself, and of loosening its hold upon the human mind. There is, as has been rightly said, nothing so contemptible as scepticism masquerading in a surplice. There is nothing so offensive and grotesque as the picture of the modern critic apologising for his belief, and accommodating its central verities to the rationalising tendencies of the age in which he lives. It is a very striking instance of the salt losing its savour, of the blind leading the blind: of Revealed Truth, instead of restraining and modifying human thought and

action, humbly adapting itself to the supposed claims of human reason.

And it must be clear that the moral perils involved in such an attitude of mind are of exceptional magnitude, and that they are of necessity far-reaching in their influence upon conduct and character. Fear of punishment, it is true, is not the best and highest motive for right-doing ; but it is a very powerful motive nevertheless, and, with certain orders of mind, the only influence which is active in restraining and controlling the moral life.

“The Passion and Hell,” says Fr. F. W. Faber, “are the two great foundations out of which men learn a profound hatred of sin ; they are the two well heads of sacred fear ; they are two revelations of God most necessary to complete a true idea of Him.”*

The truth of these assertions may be called in question by mystic philosophers who speak of man as he exists in their own imagination ; they will not be denied by those who have stood face to face with the great problems of

* “Spiritual Conferences,”

social and moral evil, and who know from practical experience what man really is.

Any such authoritative denial of the doctrine of Hell, moreover, is bound to be disastrous to earnest faith in the central verities of the Christian religion. In the Christian scheme of Redemption one doctrine depends upon another, one implies and explains the other, and the bond which unites them cannot be severed without loosening each separate link, and without rendering the whole scheme illogical and unreasonable. The doctrine of Hell is a necessary part of this scheme, and a denial of it is almost always followed by denial of some other important doctrine connected with the Incarnation and Redemption of Christ. It inevitably leads to what is termed "advanced" and "liberal" views, and what is this but another name for disbelief, or rejection, of what the natural human reason cannot receive and fathom, and against which the unaided intellect rebels.

The religious movements of the present day, and the normal attitude of numbers of intelligent persons towards the Historic Faith are surely

ample evidence in support of this statement. To hold orthodox views has come to be regarded as a sign of imperfect education, or of inferior intellect, and there are scores of people who would think it nothing short of a personal insult were one to regard them as still believing in the existence of the orthodox Hell.

Some of them, of course, have never been taught to think logically and accurately, and merely echo the predominating views of the multitude. Some have no clear notion of what the doctrine of Hell really teaches, and direct their attack not so much against the doctrine itself, as against some popular and unwarrantable exposition of it. Some have been carried away by the postulates of their natural reason, and by a supposed conflict between the ascertained facts of modern science and revealed religion. The greater number by far are the victims of half-instructed and sceptical religious teachers, who lack the courage necessary for withstanding the stream of modern tendencies, and who are perhaps vaguely conscious that they would be of but small reputation did they not advance with

that stream. But the result is the same in either case. It is doubt and distrust of the essential truths of Revelation, and an attitude of mind which amounts to a practical rejection of them. The disappearance of Hell, by a logical process of thought and inference, transforms the entire conception of the nature of sin and its consequences. A modified and more "rational" notion of sin invalidates the doctrine of the Atonement and Redemption, and the re-adjustment of that doctrine again throws doubts upon the nature and divinity of Christ. Thus, step by step, the subtle work of destruction goes on, and is only completed when the supernatural element of Christianity has disappeared, and the disclosures of Christ respecting human duty and destiny have either been explained away, or adapted to the claims of the unregenerate intellect and unilluminated reason.

It is sometimes assumed, and in many instances even boldly asserted, that science, so far as it can be expected to express an opinion on such a subject, of necessity pronounces

against the doctrine of Hell, and that the latter stands in violent antagonism to the ascertained laws of nature and of life. But this impression, too, has no foundation whatever in fact. On the contrary, the modern doctrine of the conservation and correlation of forces testifies in favour of the existence of Hell, and, granting another life, indeed almost postulates it as a physical necessity. There are eminent scientific men who, reasoning from the reign of ascertained law in the physical universe, have inferred the reign of unchanging law in the spiritual universe, and have thus found reasonable grounds, on scientific principles, for defending and maintaining the Christian doctrine of Hell. Not very long ago, in a series of articles written for the benefit of distressed minds, Professor St George Mivart, the eminent biologist, gave expression to his views on this point. He says: "Now, any being to whom has been given that wonderful power will, with all the consequent responsibilities of a state of probation, must be able to fail as well as to succeed—the very term 'probation' implies a

risk of failure. What are we to deem probable as to the consequences of such failure? Reason unaided can tell us very little of the soul after death. Certainly we have no evidence that it will then be able to undo what it has done during life, but rather the contrary. The doctrine of the persistence of force does not favour such a view, and there is nothing which contradicts the Church's assertion that the state in which the soul finds itself at the close of life's trial cannot be reversed. If so, the man who dies in a state of aversion from the highest light and the supreme good must remain in such a state with all its inevitable consequences."

"Some will say those consequences need not be eternal. But if the cause should be unchangeable, how can the consequences change? Moreover, we are contemplating what relates to eternity, when time shall have ceased to be."

Some years ago the learned authors of that interesting work "The Unseen Universe" wrote as follows: "To some extent, no doubt, Christ's description of the universal Gehenna must be regarded as figurative, but yet we do

not think that the sayings of Christ, with regard to the unseen world, ought to be looked upon as nothing more than pure figures of speech. We feel sure that the principle of continuity cries out against such an interpretation—may they not rather be descriptions of what takes place in the unseen universe brought home to our minds by means of perfectly true comparisons with the processes and things of this present universe which they most resemble? Thus the Christian Gehenna bears to the unseen universe precisely the same relation as the Gehenna of the Jews did to the city of Jerusalem. And just as the fire was always kept up, and the worm ever active in the one, so are we forced to contemplate an enduring process in the other. For we cannot easily agree with those who would limit the existence of evil to the present world. We know now that the matter of the whole of the visible universe is of a piece with that which we recognise here, and the beings of other worlds must be subject to accidental occurrences from their relation with the outer universe in the same way as we are. But if

there be accident must there not be pain and death? Now, these are naturally associated in our minds with the presence of moral evil. We are thus drawn, if not absolutely forced, to surmise that the dark thread known as evil is one which is very deeply woven into that garment of God which is called the universe. In fine, just as the arguments of this chapter lead us to regard the whole universe as eternal, so in like manner are we led to regard evil as eternal, and therefore we cannot easily imagine the universe without its Gehenna, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. The process at all events would seem to be most probably an enduring one."*

In a striking work on "The Natural History of Hell," an American scientist says: "Every phenomenon is the result of preceding causes, and becomes itself the cause of other occurrences, and this obtains both in the moral and physical world. If the consequences of every act cling to us for all time, then the consequence of our wrong-doing can be no exception. The wrong

* Profs. P. G. Tait and B. Stewart.

doer will go down through all the endless cycles of eternity chained to his doom, not by the arbitrary sentence of a capricious judge, but by the adamantine links of cause and effect, working in strict accord with laws whose action knows no pity and no mitigation. Compared with such links the iron chains which bound the vulture-gnawed Prometheus to his rock are but as cords of silk and ropes of sand. From such a doom there is no escape but by a miracle. That the intellect and moral sensibilities may be rendered more delicate and more acute is within the range of our knowledge and experience. Some men seem to be under the influence of a moral anæsthetic, and do not feel the keen pain which results from knowing that they have done ill. But let the moral sense be awakened, and an increased knowledge attained of the evil results of their actions, and then the intellectual torture becomes fearful. As is well known to medical men, cases often arise in which the nervous system becomes supersensitive, and the prick of a pin, or the slightest touch gives exquisite pain. Let us imagine that after a

career of crime the moral and intellectual sensibilities of the evil-doer should be rendered intensely acute, can we imagine a more terrible Hell than that to which he would thus be consigned? If these sufferings are the normal result of natural laws, then, so long as these laws maintain their sway, there is no escape, and can be no pardon. Pardon—that is release from misery—can only come by a suspension of these laws, or, in other words, by a miracle."

"Thus far, then, science leads us and no farther. When she has pronounced our doom she shows no way of pardon or escape; and he who relies upon natural laws and the general beneficence of the Creator, must see that in this there is no promise of mitigation. If left to Nature, and to Nature's laws, we can only sit down in the dust and cry, "Woe is me!" *

The testimony of many other thoughtful minds might be adduced in order to demonstrate the fact that disbelief of the orthodox doctrine of Hell is not, as is sometimes supposed, the

* Philipson, "The Natural History of Hell."

characteristic of really deep and searching thinkers, but, on the contrary, rather an evidence of superficial reflection and of hasty generalisation. The pride of the half-educated, as one has well said, always discovers a short cut to unbelief.

In the course of an elaborate discussion of a kindred subject '*The Spectator*,' not very long ago, remarked : "It certainly cannot be shown that either progressive purification or progressive degradation necessarily comes to an end . . . nor have we the smallest vestige of evidence that the downward progress of the will is a terminable process, and comes to any natural end. It may do so if immortality depends only on the union with God. But there is certainly a sort of antagonism to God, which appears to be progressive, as well as the union with Him, and antagonism means conscious existence no less than love means conscious existence. All we can say is, that if a man be what Mr Gladstone terms *immortalisable*, there is no final reason (unless it be God's mercy) why he should not be immortal-

isable in one direction as well as in the other; and that, while a good deal of our moral and spiritual experience tends to show the durability of remorse, and the persistence of the growing incapacity to turn back after a certain point in the downward stage is reached, we have only the vaguest hope to rely on for our anticipation that all suffering must finally end."

"This, at least, is true," says another learned writer on the subject, "that we can find in the study of observed spiritual and moral phenomena, and in the comparison of indisputable laws of God's creation, an indication, such as prompts the watcher of the skies to expect the appearance of a new planet, that an eternal doom of evil must be awaiting sin just beyond the grave."

Again, the doctrine of Hell is declared to be in conflict with the testimony of our normal moral instincts. This is perhaps the most popular objection of all, and is one which is supposed to settle the matter finally. But this objection, too, has no foundation in fact. There is such a thing, of course, as an artificial con-

science, a way of silencing the natural voice of the heart by sophistry and reasoning. Our moral nature can be made to witness falsely. But the unperverted instinct of man, his normal natural conscience, unquestionably testifies in favour of some grievous punishment consequent upon sin.

By far the larger majority of mankind are not restrained from evil action and from self-indulgence by the love of God and of good, but by the fear of punishment vaguely felt by the conscience to be certain and unavoidable. It is this motive alone which rules and regulates the wills and affections of those whose normal tendencies are altogether downwards, and who cannot be said to be restrained by any secondary law governing the social life. They may not be able to define the mysterious power which is thus working in their moral nature ; they may even be inclined to deny its existence ; but it is there, nevertheless, and is apt at certain times to make itself most practically and unpleasantly felt.

But, however that may be, it is certain beyond

all possibility of doubt that the doctrine of Hell is both explicitly and implicitly taught by Christ and by the Apostles, and that it is one of the very corner-stones upon which the Christian system of Redemption and Restoration reposes. And, admitting this fact, it is certainly an unpardonable offence on the part of our authorised teachers, for the sake of notoriety, to waver and hesitate in fully declaring this truth, or so to veil it and obscure it as to empty it of its full moral weight and import. In the face of the momentous interests at stake such mode of action is not charity, but cruelty and unfaithfulness. For, "if indeed so terrible a doom awaits the finally impenitent, the surest guarantee for escaping it hereafter is not to forget it now. If the doctrine of eternal punishment be a revealed verity it is treason to God and treachery to men to withhold or disguise it, or tamper with it, because we may choose to think it better to leave them in ignorance of what He has taught it better to reveal."

One fact remains: The doctrine of Hell may

be rejected—its truth cannot be disproved, and the disquieting thought certainly remains that it is conceivable. If it be true, unbelief will be seen to be a far more perilous thing than may at first sight appear. The denial may in itself be no sin ; but by the consequences of it we may forfeit the means of attaining salvation, since we put ourselves outside the reach of Christ's method of redemption. Those, therefore, who deny it should have a very high degree of instinctive certainty or they are guilty of fearful levity. A man intending to commit suicide may change his mind when he is in the water, but he may for all that be unable to catch hold of the rope which is held out to him, and he may perish. The consequences would be the same as in the case of the man who will not catch hold of the rope. Rightly, therefore, does Diderot say : “A sensible man will act in life as though there was a Hell so long as a fragment of doubt as to the existence of Hell remains in his mind.” And the Christian Church, if she is to fulfil her mission and the central aim of her institution, has no

alternative but to proclaim the truth as her Divine Founder committed it to her. Her duty is to control human thought and speculation, not to be controlled and influenced by them. She cannot modify any one of her doctrines, "or tamper with the exactness of its expression even though by doing so she would win half the world. Her mission is to convert the nations to the truth, not to adapt the truth to them, and every attempt to do so must be fatal alike to the cause of truth and to the souls it is designed to serve."*

It should be borne in mind that our inability to fully understand the doctrine of Hell, or to reconcile it with our imperfect and limited conception of justice and of right, cannot possibly constitute an argument against its truth. We might with equally good reason reject every other doctrine of the Christian religion. The most important and central of them escape full intellectual apprehension. We see at the best but as "through a glass darkly."* Indeed, we would

* Rev. H. G. S. Bowden's Preface to "Revealed Religion,"
by F. Hettinger, D.D.

expect that, with beings who have a flaw in their nature, a revelation would be imperfectly understood since it would be impossible to accurately express divine and eternal things in human and changeable, and consequently inaccurate, terms.

And “let it be observed . . . that we are not bound to be able to solve all difficulties which may be urged against a thesis which from other sources is abundantly proved. Even in matters of physical science no one expects this. There are difficulties against the law of gravitation itself which cannot be solved, yet no one thinks of doubting the existence of the law. Revelation has its difficulties, but so has existence itself. Revelation has its mysteries, but so has rationalism. Meanwhile, the certainties which we rightly hold must be held devoutly, and the difficulties may well wait their fuller solution in the light of a brighter day.”

* “In a mirror,” according to the Revised Version.

SOME POPULAR OBJECTIONS AND DIFFICULTIES CONSIDERED

I.

The Goodness of God

WE are constantly told in the present day that the sins and failures of our moral life are chiefly due to our education and our social environments. There is, it is said, strictly speaking, no such thing as deliberate sin. Transgression of the moral law is not so much an act of rebellion against God, as a fault of temperament, and an innate lack of that strength of character which is known to exercise control over the desires and tendencies of our lower nature. And God is too good to punish man for what is after all only due to his natural and inherited weakness. In the progressive development of

the race the higher side of our nature is slowly but steadily being evolved, and when it shall have attained its full development, and conquered human weakness and ignorance, sin and vice, too, and the miseries which flow from them, will disappear from the earth.

This is the fashionable modern philosophy of life which, as most of us know, is professed by vast numbers of intelligent and cultivated persons. It is attractive because of its seeming reasonableness, and it has the advantage that it solves some of the most difficult problems which have ever perplexed the human mind. It certainly disposes, in the simplest and most natural way possible, of the claims of the Christian religion, and abolishes its unattractive and seemingly unreasonable creed. It has one serious disadvantage, however. It is emphatically contradicted by all we know of God and of His mode of action within the natural sphere of life. We certainly have no evidence whatever there that, because of His goodness, He makes allowance for our innate tendencies, or for the weaknesses and frailties of our nature. On the

contrary, we know the very opposite to be the case. We know for certain that He is quite capable of hurting us severely, and even permanently, and that He rigidly and unerringly punishes sin.

In the natural sphere, disobedience to the laws of the physical life is invariably followed by bodily suffering and pain. Indulgence in forbidden joys and pleasures brings with it consequences which may be of the most far-reaching character. They may effectually hinder and paralyse a useful career, or embitter each single joy of a long life. In the same way transgressions of the moral law are followed by remorse, by mental sufferings which are infinitely greater sometimes than those endured by the body. There is, we are told, nothing so terrible as the torture of an evil conscience, even though it may be possible to hide such an experience beneath a calm external demeanour. Murderers have been known to deliver themselves up to justice, after years of moral agony, solely to escape the tortures of a conscience stricken with remorse. We all admit that, by

reason of our moral frailty, the pains and sorrows of our life are greater by far than its pleasures and joys.

From the standpoint of our imperfect knowledge such suffering may seem severe and out of proportion to the character of the offence. We say: The transgression or the fault was due to our ignorance, or perhaps to our peculiar temperament; the transgressor was scarcely responsible. But there must surely be another side to the matter, since the self-evident fact remains, that, in spite of His goodness, and in spite of our ignorance and our temperament, God certainly does punish. Our personal responsibility must, as a matter of fact, be infinitely greater than we commonly suppose. Our moral intuitions certainly would seem to support this view. Conscience, in its normal manifestations, incessantly and emphatically witnesses to our responsibility. In language and promptings which we may not be able to define and analyse, but which are, nevertheless, audible to the inner ear, it never ceases to remind us that, whatever our temperament,

moral transgression is an act of the will, and that, in spite of certain natural tendencies, we are absolutely free, and may, if we will, resist the evil and do the good. And the law of evolution itself surely points to the trustworthiness of this universal faculty, since it is impossible to account for its existence except by the recognition of a higher moral sphere with which it is in correspondence.

In any case, although we cannot always reconcile God's goodness with His ways of punishment, we do not, on that account, doubt His goodness, or deny the fact of His punishment. We admit both, however great the problem they present, because for both there is abundant and satisfactory evidence. We constantly confess that God is good even though He punishes severely in the sphere of the natural life.

Now, if we can, in a measure, reconcile God's goodness with His severity here and now, why should we not be able, with fuller knowledge and enlarged faculties, to do so hereafter? Our difficulty may be entirely due to our ignorance,

and to our imperfect, and therefore mistaken, conception of things. "It is possible," says Professor Mivart, "that could we understand what eternity really is, the notion of the reversal of the soul's condition might be seen to involve an absurdity. Moreover, such a change does not appear to us reconcilable with justice, for any temporal retribution, however prolonged, would, if succeeded by eternal happiness, place all men practically on a level. For centuries upon centuries vanish into nothingness when compared with eternity. Science, at least, lends no support to the belief that a change can take place in the consequences of any action once performed. It is not inexorable severity, and the continuance of chastisement, but mercy and forgiveness which the aspects of Nature and their scientific study render difficult of belief."

"We know only too well that pain and agony exist here. What ground can we have for denying the possibility of their existence hereafter? Any unnecessary and useless suffering cannot, of course, co-exist with a good God. But

who can pretend to know God's ultimate end in creation? That His purposes cannot contradict our clear ethical perceptions is certain, but there may be useful and benevolent ends subserved by suffering which we cannot fathom, and there may be Divine purposes which, without contradicting, transcend even goodness, and which our faculties are quite unable to conceive of."*

In any case we recognise God's goodness even though we cannot understand, and fully reconcile it with His methods of punishment. We know for certain that God is not incapable of hurting us even though He is good. And if this be so here, why not there? The higher probability is, that laws similar to those which we know to be in operation in the natural sphere are in operation in the supernatural sphere also.

It must always be borne in mind that Hell is not of God's creation, but of man's: no arbitrary infliction of a vengeful Deity; but a law working in the inmost depths of our moral nature. "Hell is a law. Just as it is a law

* "Nineteenth Century."

that pent-up water, when its weight and force have reached a certain point, breaks its barriers and sweeps down upon the region below it, so it is a law that sin or unrighteousness or wilful aversion from God, if it reach the boundary, death, unreformed, will go on for ever so, and will bring eternal separation from God, and separation in a spiritual nature means misery.” *

The goodness of God, it is sometimes urged, must be infinitely greater than the goodness of man. And, on the whole, man is merciful ; he would not inflict any terrible permanent punishment upon his fellow-man however vile. How, then, can the infinitely more merciful God be supposed to inflict upon any man the punishment of Hell ? We do not fully understand, but we must bear in mind that a really true judgment of any man can be passed by God only. Our human judgment is necessarily limited, and is warped by the flaw which is innate in our nature. We cannot clearly discern the actual character and state of an evil man ; we are deceived by false seemings, and in our

* *Dublin Review* (1881), vol. v. p. 130.

judgment, we unconsciously introduce the element of our own guilt. As fellow-sinners we make excuses and invent ways of escape. We judge the action, not the state of the heart and the character from which it flows. We know nothing of the aims and purposes which sway another soul. We regard every soul, moreover, as still capable of improvement and reformation: we cannot banish that thought from our minds. What would our judgment be could we realise that the probation is passed, and could we see as God sees?

Difficulties, of course, remain. It could not well be otherwise since we cannot see as God sees. But it is certain that the goodness of God, as exhibited in the facts of life, cannot be urged in contradiction of the doctrine of Hell. On the contrary, His present method of dealing with men is a most powerful argument in its favour. It is sentiment, not thoughtful reflection, that disputes this. "Retributive justice," writes Cardinal Newman, "is the very attribute under which God is primarily brought before us in the teachings of our natural conscience. The

great mystery is, not that evil should have no end, but that it had a beginning.”*

It is surely imperfect and distorted vision, then, which only recognises the goodness of God, but pretends to see nothing of the other and severe aspects of His nature. It is folly and wilful blindness to deny that they exist. “I understand not,” says Mr Ruskin, “the most dangerous, because most attractive form of modern infidelity, which, pretending to exalt the beneficence of the Deity, degrades it into a reckless infinitude of mercy and blind obliteration of the work of sin: and which does this chiefly by dwelling on the manifold appearances of God’s kindness on the face of creation. Such kindness is, indeed, everywhere and always visible, but not alone. Wrath and threatening are invariably mingled with the love, and in the utmost solitudes of Nature, the existence of Hell seems to me as legibly declared by a thousand spiritual utterances as that of Heaven. It is well for us to dwell with thankfulness on the unfolding of the flower, and the falling of the

* “Grammar of Assent,” p. 415.

dew, and the sleep of the green fields in the sunshine; but the blasted trunk, the barren rock, the moaning of the bleak winds, the roar of the black, perilous, merciless whirlpools of the mountain streams, the solemn solitudes of moors and seas, the continual fading of all beauty into darkness, and of all strength into dust—have these no language for us? We may seek to escape their teaching by reasonings touching the good which is wrought out of all evil, but it is vain sophistry. The good succeeds to the evil, as day succeeds the night, but so also the evil to the good. Gerizim and Ebal, birth and death, light and darkness, Heaven and Hell, divide the existence of man and his futurity. . . . The love of God is, however, always shown by the predominance or greater sum of good in the end, but never by the annihilation of evil. The modern doubts of eternal punishment are not so much the consequence of benevolence as of feeble powers of reasoning. Every one admits that God brings finite good out of finite evil. Why not, therefore, infinite good out of infinite evil.”*

* “The Stones of Venice,” Part III. pp. 138 and 139.

II.

The Justice of God

THE world asks: How can a just God inflict unceasing punishment for a temporal offence, even though it be of the most heinous character? How can He punish finite sin infinitely? Punishment is a remedial measure in its ultimate aim. It is inflicted with a view to the improvement and restoration of the offender, not to his permanent suffering and misery. A convict undergoing a long term of imprisonment for a grave offence may obtain some alleviation and indulgence upon giving evidence of an improved moral condition. There are agencies at work for still further helping and improving him upon his restoration to the world. The feeling entertained towards him is at all times that of pity and compassion. Even the death penalty is inflicted with the greatest possible reluctance, and as a deterrent measure rather than from any other motive. There are numbers of intelligent persons who, although abhorring the crime of

murder, strongly condemn it on moral grounds, seeing that by it the true end of punishment is not attained. It is under any circumstances felt to be an extreme and severe measure, in itself calculated to expiate the crime, and, in a sense, to restore the offender to God's favour.

And is God less forgiving and merciful than man? Is it reasonable to suppose that He will unceasingly punish for an offence for which man would only punish for a season? Might not such punishment with right be called unjust and unreasonable? Is it not cruel and vindictive?

But a subtle error surely lies at the root of this familiar method of reasoning. We have, in the first instance, constantly to bear in mind that the punishment of sin is not God's arbitrary act, but a fundamental law of the universe: the result of certain circumstances—a final and necessary link in the chain of cause and effect. It is the inevitable consequence of our moral freedom.

We must further remember that it is not a question of particular acts or deeds, but of

character, of a certain definite moral state and condition, of a soul rendering itself incapable of union with God. We probably attach mistaken ideas to the words finite and infinite. We call the passing act of sin a finite act, and cannot conceive how it can, under any circumstances, carry with it infinite punishment. But it is, after all, not the act of sin which brings about the punishment, but the moral character which lies behind it, and of which it is the outward manifestation.

We have, beyond doubt, a certain analogy to the Divine law of punishment in our own human and imperfect modes of measuring out punishment. It is not, and cannot be, a question of time. A single act, such as a theft or a murder or a forgery, is committed in a moment of time, yet the punishment inflicted may extend over many years. The law does not determine the amount of punishment by the time occupied in committing the offence, but by the nature of the offence, and the moral state and character to which it points. A judge weighs the general evidence which

is before him. A single act occupying five minutes for its execution may thus involve a life-long punishment, and may wreck the entire earthly career of the offender. In the sphere of our present life, therefore, there is undoubtedly such a thing as permanent punishment for a mere temporal offence. A certain law of fitness, to which we yield instinctive obedience, seems to be at work, and lies at the root of the matter. Thus, a low, moral character is universally felt to be unfit for certain higher moral conditions and environments. It has no affinity with them, and is excluded from them, not by any arbitrary act of man, but by common consent.

Now, if this be so here, in this present life, where change is still possible, and where a transformation can still be effected, how is it to be there, where the character is no longer capable of change, and where it is a question of a permanent moral state and condition ?

In any case it will be admitted that, in our present life, these laws are at work, and that we cannot possibly escape or evade them. We do not fully understand them ourselves

and, from our standpoint, they may even appear to us sometimes unfair and unjust. But it is certain that they continue in operation, nevertheless, and in spite of our views and opinion. Is it, then, unreasonable to conclude that similar fixed laws are in operation in the life beyond, and that there, too, we shall not be able to evade or escape them? Some of these laws the Christian Revelation only hints at, of others it speaks in clear and unmistakable terms. We do not like them; they appear to us unfair and unjust, and they offend our sense of the proportion of things. But they may be just laws all the same, and it is conceivable that we shall recognise them to be such when we have passed away from the life of the body, and are in actual touch with the other sphere. Judging from our knowledge of the present state of things we may, at any rate, regard it as certain that they will continue in operation whether we understand them fully and approve of them or not.

Any rightly instructed Christian believes that a spiritual condition, initiated or induced

by a life of moral depravity and enmity against God, must continue unless conversion and reconciliation take place. The all-important question therefore is : Is a change of mind possible after death ? Christianity says : No ! Its Founder declared over and over again that forgiveness and restoration are possible only in this present life. His offer of mercy was always and distinctly limited. He never ceased urging the need of an immediate change of mind, since there was a time when that change would be no longer possible, and when the door of Heaven would be shut.

Science says : No ! Character is the ultimate and necessary result of certain moral acts and states. It is the gradual and progressive building-up of a distinct organism, and it is no more possible to change the form it finally assumes than to undo the separate acts which were instrumental in its construction. Human experience, moreover, confirms the verdict of science. A character, it is well known, is not apt to change much after a certain age and point of evolution have been reached. It is

admittedly a difficult, if not an impossible, thing to undo the subtle spiritual effect of a certain long-continued attitude of the mind.

Now, a man remaining impenitent after an act of sin, perhaps repeating it, and thereby hastening the soul's downward course, declares enmity against God. His normal moral attitude is an attitude of opposition and rebellion. We all admit that in that state he is unfit for the presence of God—out of touch and affinity with the sphere of the pure and the Divine. But, if change be impossible after death, but death overtake him while in this state of opposition and rebellion, how is he to escape? What is to become of him? Where is he to go? He must in that state of rebellion appear before God. The time of probation and education is over. He is in a sphere where time is no more, where it is no longer a question of acts and attitudes of mind that can be undone and repented of, but of a character, of a spiritual state which is the crown and ultimate result of all the acts and mental attitudes of many years.

Can we not here trace some faint outline of

the great truth? Do not some of our difficulties melt away? Are they as great as they appear at first sight?

Even Dean Farrar says: "I believe that without holiness no man can see the Lord, and that no sinner can be pardoned or accepted till he has repented, and till his free will is in unison with the will of God, and I cannot tell whether some souls may not resist God for ever, and therefore may not be for ever shut out from His presence."*

The term, Eternal Punishment, may be an imperfect and inadequate term: it may not nearly convey the truth as it actually is. Language capable only of expressing and explaining finite things can scarcely be expected to adequately express the infinite. But is not the difficulty in the term rather than in the idea and principle which underlie it, and which the term is meant to convey? Is it not due to the fact that our power of thought is limited, and that our understandings are finite?

And it is surely untrue to say that the

* "Eternal Hope."

ultimate aim of all human punishment is remedial. A single application of this theory will display its fallacy. Let us suppose a judge could only punish with a view to the improvement of the offender. All criminals might then be divided into two classes. Those in the first class would have no difficulty in proving to the judge their incorrigibility and hopeless moral condition, the others their sincere regret and repentance. The aim of any kind of punishment would thus entirely disappear, and the accused would have to be discharged. But what are the facts of the case? Punishment falls again and again upon the wholly depraved in character, in whom it has never been known to produce the slightest change or improvement. A person may commit a certain offence over and over again, he may already have spent the best part of his life inside a gaol, and both judge and jury may know full well that no additional pain and punishment will change his character. Yet they continue to punish, simply because the social and moral order demand it. It is felt to be necessary that certain acts of sin and

transgression should be met by a certain measure of suffering and punishment.

In the same way human justice punishes the man who is already thoroughly penitent, and who is not in the least likely to repeat his offence; it punishes those who, for other reasons, may be already incapable of doing further mischief. But whatever motives and ends may be assigned to such punishments, whether they be inflicted to act as a deterrent, or in some way to bring about the improvement of society, it is certain that underlying them is a kind of moral necessity which all men acknowledge, and to which they unhesitatingly submit.

Now, is it inconceivable that in the same way a moral necessity, not clearly discerned by us in our present state, but intimately bound up with the entire order of the spiritual universe, underlies the law of punishment acting in the other world? May it not be that, as Professor Mivart points out, could we understand what eternity really is, the notion of the reversal of the soul's condition might be seen to involve an absurdity? At all events, it is surely a

mistake to assert that the idea of a permanent condition of punishment violates our moral intuitions, and that we have no analogy at all in our human methods of punishment? And it is surely a perilous thing to deny its possibility simply because it does not appear to fit in with the dictates of our limited and finite reason.

But the further question has been asked : Why cannot a merciful God arrange His punishment in such a way as to compel the reformation of the offender? Such reformation, however, would surely be a compulsory reformation, and would be inconsistent with our moral freedom. But moral improvement implies moral freedom, and excludes compulsion. God may, of course, impel, but He cannot compel, since the choice would then no longer be our own. Hence the possibility remains of a sinner resisting all the means of improvement, and remaining unimproved. Now, what is God to do with such incorrigibles ? He must either continue to punish, which is eternal punishment, or He must finally receive the hopeless case into

Heaven, which means the triumph of sin. The sinner, in fact, would be conquering God. In the Divine order remedial punishment, of course, exists, but only in a temporal sense, and while the soul is still swayed by conflicting motives, and consequently still capable of change. This must of necessity cease when the character is finally fixed, and a definite turning-away from God has taken place. The exceeding severity of some of God's temporal punishments surely involve the thought of an infinitely greater punishment to come. The latter only rationally explains the former. Otherwise, for what possible end could God be said to punish so severely? Is not the peril of permanent unhappiness an all-sufficient end?

But the secret of eternal punishment is probably fully solved in an accurate knowledge of the real nature and effect of sin. In our present state we can have no adequate conception as to the way in which it affects the soul's life, and shapes its destiny. We only see it in its outward manifestations, its general effect upon character. We cannot

trace its more subtle inward operations. In all probability pride—that most terrible of all human vices—lies at the root of the whole matter. We have in the experience of life some intimation of what pride can do in the human soul. It is the source and root of almost every other evil and vice.

“Obstinacy in evil during life,” says a mystic writer, “is often caused by pride which refuses to yield and to avow mistakes. Moreover, man is under the influence of matter which throws a veil over his spiritual perceptions, and fascinates him with false seemings. When this veil drops away from him his mind is suddenly flooded with light, and he is sobered from the intoxication.”

The terms in which sin is spoken of in the New Testament admit of no compromise, and certainly lead us to infer that our conceptions of it are most imperfect and inadequate. Christ declared sin to be the death of the soul. He pronounced no sacrifice to be too great in the effort to escape it and to overcome it. “It was better,” He said, “that we should pluck out our

eyes than that they should lead us into sin." The Apostles echoed these thoughts. The early martyrs experienced their truth, and had an intense conviction of the reality of Hell and its punishments. Whenever men have grown in spiritual understanding and discernment, and have by prayer and subjugation of their lower self cultivated the higher self, they have also changed their view as to the real nature and consequence of sin. Is it unreasonable to conclude that such a changed view is, after all, the correct one?

"Immediately after death," declared the Seeress of Prevorst, "that natural language which lies in every man is revealed to him, and he reads at once his whole life, with its acts and omissions in its character. The account is engraven on his heart in figures of fire, and woe to him whose demerits weigh down the balance, who has died unrepentant in his sins, untrusting in God, and unbelieving in his Redeemer."

III.

*Why should Death be supposed to
terminate the Time of our Probation?*

THIS is a question which has recently been asked with much seriousness, and which has, in innumerable instances, received a favourable answer from the pulpit. Such an answer is probably felt to offer the only possible compromise between the clear statements of the New Testament and the claims of "enlightened" reason, and it certainly opens an honourable way of escape out of a great difficulty. It thus becomes possible for a modern Christian to adhere to the teaching of Holy Scripture respecting eternal punishment, and at the same time to empty it of its meaning by prolonging man's time of probation, and, consequently, his chances of salvation and restoration, almost indefinitely.

It is but reasonable to assume, it is argued,

that those endless multitudes who have never had an opportunity in this life of fully understanding and accepting the Christian message, and of whom it may safely be said that they would have accepted it had they clearly understood it, that they will have that opportunity given them there. Is it conceivable that these multitudes will be cast away without any such further probation? In the face of the experience of life, and of the difficulties men are known to labour under with respect to spiritual matters, does not the very thought offend our moral sense and our reason? In a thousand instances is not life far too short to admit of anything like a completed moral education and probation? Are not thousands cut down in the very flower of their life, when the best powers of their souls and minds are but beginning to unfold themselves, and when the character may be said to be only in the process of formation?

Is it not more than probable, too, that with the increase of light shed upon the soul in the other state, a change will pass over the soul's vision, and that a greater and more powerful

impulse will be given to spiritual effort and endeavour? When men who have lived evil lives here on earth shall have come to see more clearly what consequences their deeds involve, are they not much more likely to repent, and thus, in the course of time, to be restored to God's favour?

Are there not, moreover, one or two instances recorded in Holy Writ which may, without unfairness, be said to testify in favour of such a further chance and probation after death? Did not Christ preach to the spirits in prison? Did He not imply that some sins at least would find forgiveness in the other world? Did he not promise the joys of Paradise to the dying thief?

The majority of us are familiar with popular questions and statements of this character. They may be said to be in everybody's mouth. They have every appearance of plausibility and reasonableness, and their acceptance certainly tends to relieve the human spirit of an intolerable burden. But ought we not to distrust them for that very reason? Is the human

mind, in its natural state, a safe guide in spiritual matters? Is man likely to unaidedly discern a truth which is constantly opposing itself to his normal desires and inclinations? Is he not much more likely to make every effort to get rid of it? Experience has already taught us that he is unquestionably mistaken in the matter of sin, that his views in this direction are false and distorted, and that his philosophy is constructed on his lower dictates and promptings. Is it not infinitely more probable that in this matter, too, he is mistaken, and that in his contention he is but echoing his own lower desires? Would he not be altogether the gainer if it could be shown that his soul's probation was to be prolonged beyond the terms of his natural life? Might it not then be justifiable for him to take a much less serious view of life, and, without ceasing to be a Christian in thought, extract from it an infinitely greater measure of enjoyment? Christian thinkers have cause to be on their guard against these supposed dictates of human reason. There is about them the savour of a

false philosophy emanating from the mind darkened by the shadow of sin.

When we come to an examination of the contention itself, we are at once met by one great and insuperable difficulty. "Not a single passage can be cited either from the Old Testament or from the New which even hints at a continued or second probation after death. Those which may be quoted as bearing on the continued cleansing and perfecting of the elect . . . do not speak of them as still on their trial." This is a fact which is admitted by all careful students of this subject who approach it with an open mind, and it is one which any intelligent person may easily verify for himself. The idea is not contained in the New Testament, unless, indeed, it be extracted from an expression here and there made to yield such a meaning by a strained and artificial interpretation. But such exegetical tricks cannot satisfy honest minds. *Fairly* interpreted, all Christ's statements respecting the period of man's probation can have but one meaning, and that points clearly and emphatically in the opposite

direction. And is it conceivable that, if it were otherwise, He would have been silent on the subject, knowing, as He must have known, the moral difficulties which the doctrine involved, and the opposition it could not fail to encounter? Is it at all likely that, rather than disclose such an important truth to us, He should have taken pains to hide it, and to deliberately mislead us? It is unreasonable, if not irreverent, to entertain such a thought, and to attempt to reconcile it with all His other utterances so clearly pointing the opposite way. The impossibility of doing so becomes apparent immediately we examine these utterances with the thought of a continued probation after death in the mind. They become simply incomprehensible, imposing, as they would in that case impose, upon our life an unspeakable but clearly quite unnecessary terror. And can we forget that most solemn parable of Dives and Lazarus uttered by Christ Himself for the express purpose, it would appear, of warning us "that this present life is the time of trial, and that after death it will be too late to

change." It is possible, of course, to pervert reason, and to empty the simplest human language of its plain and self-evident meaning —some modern theologians are expert hands at this kind of work—but do men of common-sense and of unperverted judgment discover a way of compromise? Can they reconcile the belief in continued probation after death with the lesson and warning conveyed in this one parable?

And how does the matter really look from the standpoint of fact and of human experience? In contemplating the human mind we have to distinguish, and do distinguish, between two conditions: between a state of development and a state of maturity. A condition of development must some time or other reach its end; it cannot go on indefinitely. In a certain sense man's education, in the temporal sphere, may perhaps be said to go on indefinitely, and to continue during life; but this is true only in respect of the intellectual side of his nature. He is apt to widen his

views, and to change his mind, as he gathers additional experience and knowledge. But it is not so in the moral sphere. There the process of change and improvement is, for the most part, limited to the period of development, and maturity is reached after a time. At a certain age, or after certain experiences of life, the character is apt to become definitely fixed, and by it the soul's life in this world is determined. We speak of a man as *having* a strong or a weak character, and our conception is that of a point reached, a definite moral state and condition attained.

Now, if this be so in the natural sphere of human life ; if we can already here, in a measure, ascertain a certain fixity of character, why should it not be so in the supernatural sphere ? The intellectual difficulty, clearly, lies altogether the other way. We experience it in the effort to conceive of a great moral change taking place after a certain age and condition of development have been reached : after a man's character is formed.

Some people seem to imagine that the act of

dying has in it some peculiar sanctifying virtue, but what is there in physical death that should lead us to suppose this? It is but a casting-aside of the soul's outer garment, its removal from its earthly environments. Physical death, terminating the temporal state and the season admitting of a change of mind and disposition, of undoing unkindly deeds and unsaying hard words, is, from the standpoint of our present knowledge, far more likely to end the time of probation than to prolong it. The soul, removed from its earthly tenement, and the natural sphere of its operations, is certainly, so far as we know, no longer in a position to undo the past even if it would. It has ceased to be in touch with it and its separate events, which have become memories only, while their moral results, which have gone to form the character, are permanent and abiding realities.

But admitting for a moment the possibility of a moral change after death, have we any good ground for supposing that additional light and knowledge are likely to effect it?

Let us remember," says a writer already quoted, "what is one of the tritest truisms in ethics, the essential tendency of habits to become inveterate. Every student of Aristotle will be familiar with the principle, and all experience confirms it. But there is no reason for supposing that the laws of our moral being will be revolutionised in a future state. Granting then, for argument's sake, that the time of probation may be indefinitely prolonged after death, what right have we to assume that he who is filthy will not be filthy still? So far as we have any data for judging, the contrary is far more probable. . . . How can we be sure, to say the very least, that the will, which in this world remained obdurate to the last, will certainly in the next world yield to the gracious influence it had finally rejected here? And will conversion be easier after death? That is at best a purely gratuitous hypothesis. . . . Is the severity of judgment to produce the requisite change? . . . But pain in itself has no converting power. Suffering willingly endured has, to be sure, under the Gospel

dispensation, a salutary, what may be called a kind of sacramental, efficacy derived from the passion of Christ. But it works *ex opere operantis* only; its effect depends wholly on the use that is made of it, and it does but harden and brutalise those it fails to sanctify. There is a terrible truth, which experience abundantly bears out, in those inspired words, applicable alike to the state of obstinate sinners in this life, and of those who are finally confirmed in their evil will in the next. ‘And they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of Heaven because of their pain and their sores, AND REPENTED NOT OF THEIR DEEDS.’* A soldier’s life is a hard and painful one, but the army is no school of saints. In this life bad men are usually made worse by pain, why should we assume that it will certainly transform them in the next? I am speaking, be it remembered, of those who die unconverted, not of the imperfect, who die with the germs of faith and repentance, however invisible to human sight,

* *Apocalypse*, xvi. 10-11.

already in their souls, and whose initial conversion is perfected in the ‘willing agony’ of purgatorial chastisement. And I repeat, that there is no ground whatever for assuming that the discipline of pain, which only hardened them on earth, will convert and purify them in the world beyond the grave.”* Dr Farrar, too, fully admits this. He says: “Do not think that repentance is an easy thing; and be quite sure of this, that the longer it is delayed, the less easy does it become, and the more terrible are the consequences, both here and hereafter, which the delay involves.†

How frequently is the permanence and fixedness of character demonstrated in the phenomenon of what is termed “death-bed repentance”? A death-bed repentance may, of course, be perfectly sincere and effective, but so far as human judgment can go, it scarcely ever is so. When recovery unexpectedly takes place, the moral experiences passed through are almost always disowned,

* H. N. Oxenham, pp. 59-60.

† “Eternal Hope,” p. 152.

and the supposed penitent returns to his former mode of life. The character is too definitely formed to admit of any appreciable change.

But again it is urged that the time allotted to us as the period of our probation is too short; "that the longest and most eventful career does not give full play to the latent capabilities of even a very ordinary character." This difficulty, however, could only be maintained if it could be shown that the time of our life given us for our moral regeneration is too short in proportion to our capabilities and opportunities. And who will presume to judge accurately in such a difficult matter? Who can see as God sees? He who accurately knows our capabilities, and who has appointed our time of probation, is surely free to decide when it is to terminate for each one of us. And it cannot be denied that, considering the moral stimulus which it involves, it was necessary that God in His wisdom should leave us in ignorance as to the exact time of its termination.

Now, any right-thinking man is bound to admit that, with the powers given to him, he might at this present moment be a much better man than he really is, and that, if he had used his opportunities aright, he might by now have completed his probation so as to be able to appear before God. The plea as to the shortness of time is a subtle attempt at self-deception. There is a certain reasonableness about it at first sight, but it vanishes when the matter is really carefully looked into and the difficulty is analysed. It is not, remember, a question of certain acts and things done or left undone, but of a character finally formed in a moment of time. That moment may come early in life, it may come late. No mortal man can tell when the decisive crisis in the soul's life is reached from God's point of view. "He to whom a thousand years are as one day can, if it so please Him, as infallibly test the entire bent and purpose of the will by a single trial as after a course prolonged through countless ages. . . ." If the period of probation is to be limited at all, it matters nothing to the unerring judgment of

the Allwise at what precise point the term is fixed. He alone can know what is in the heart of man. One thought, one decision, one action sometimes sums up the complex moral life extending over a course of years, and, so far as we know, that thought or decision may fix the character. The probability, indeed, from our point of view is that it does so. And from this standpoint our time of probation is really much longer than would seem necessary.

In any case a *change* of mind involves no question of time. It is a moral act, an attitude of the will requiring for its manifestation a mere fraction of time, and, by that fraction of time rightly employed, the soul may secure its escape.

Few thoughtful persons will be disposed to doubt that belief in continued probation after death diminishes the seriousness of life as the one trial time for eternity. It tends to relax our moral energies. "Release from the notion of eternal punishment would be felt by the great mass as a release from the sense of moral

obligation; and, relying on the certainty that all would be sure to be right at last, men would run the risk of the intermediate punishment, whatever it might be, and plunge into self-indulgence without hesitation.”* It remains certain that the fear of punishment plays an infinitely greater part in the evolution of man’s moral life than is commonly supposed. We should look upon the actual facts of life and upon man as he really is; we are then scarcely likely to be led astray by high-sounding phrases and arguments so dear to the natural mind. The exceptionally clear and uncompromising declarations of Holy Scripture on this subject could not have been uttered without a very definite aim, and it should not be forgotten that He who knew what was in man “has used language which, on the hypothesis of a probation after death, loses all, or nearly all, its force. What mean those repeated warnings about the thief in the night; the sudden return of the master of the house, or of the bride-

* “*Essays Historical and Theological*” by J. B. Mozley, D.D., vol. ii. pp. 296, 298.

66 *Objections and Difficulties Considered*

groom; the two men in one bed; the two women at the mill; the two men in the field, of whom one was taken and the other left; what mean those reiterated exhortations of Christ and His Apostle to continual watchfulness but that life is short, the time of death uncertain, and there is no repentance in the grave?"

IV.

Why does not God ultimately destroy the Soul Incapable of Moral Improvement and Union with Him?

PUNISHMENT, it is urged, may be a moral necessity. The Divine law of justice may, in a way we do not understand, demand its infliction. But why should that punishment be unending? Why does not God, being merciful, impose a punishment severe and long enough to correspond with the offence and to vindicate His law, and then wipe out the sinner's conscious existence for ever? Such a punishment, if not in accord with our own moral feelings and intuitions, would at least be reconcilable with reason, it would relieve the distressed mind of that dreadful nightmare which is created by a belief in a condition of unending misery.

It is impossible not to sympathise with the

thoughts and feelings which have prompted this question. It sounds like the despairing cry of the soul finding itself face to face with a terrible and most unwelcome truth. It is another effort of the conscience to find some way of escape out of an overwhelming difficulty. But there is probably no theory propounded in connection with this subject which rests upon a more unstable and impossible foundation. The annihilation of the wicked hereafter is, as Mr Oxenham very justly remarks, "A notion so purely artificial and gratuitous in itself, so directly in the teeth of all scriptural and traditional authority, and so violently opposed to the rudimentary instincts of natural religion, that it is never likely to take root and to spread. It is a mere clumsy attempt to cut the knot of a difficulty which its authors cannot solve by introducing another far more fatal one in its place."*

If we have a moral difficulty in conceiving of a God who inflicts infinite punishment upon a soul rebelling against His known laws, what

* "Catholic Eschatology and Universalism."

are we to think of a God who first punishes and then destroys? Hell, after all, might be conceived of as a state of suffering merely from the point of view of a higher state of glory and delight; it might look different from some other point of view. We have here on earth conditions of pain and anguish which cannot be expected to cease during life, but which we nevertheless consider infinitely preferable to death and extinction. But the thought of punishment after death, followed by the soul's extinction, surely involves a moral difficulty which is infinitely greater than that which this theory is propounded to solve.

At all events, it is certain that the idea of annihilation, of the extinction of our conscious personality by death or after death, is a conception contradicted both by Christianity and by our elementary moral instincts. It is because their witness to the contrary is so clear and emphatic that the doctrine of Hell and of future punishment awakens in us such serious thought, and engages our interest at all.

But, granting for a moment that the words of Christ admit of an interpretation favourable to this theory, how would the matter look from the standpoint of the sinner? In its logical inference would it not mean his victory over God and the ultimate triumph of sin? Would not God be putting it within the power of man to compel Him to destroy a creature which He has created and constituted for His glory? In creating man God surely desired man's being; it is therefore unreasonable to suppose that He can at the same time desire his not being. We can believe that man may, by a sinful life, place himself outside the sphere of God's love and mercy, but we cannot surely suppose that he can, by any act of his own, place himself outside the sphere of God's rule and government, and thus escape his eternal destiny. The very thought involves an absurdity, and limits the Creator's power over the creature.

It must be clear, moreover, that on this assumption anything like order would disappear

from the sphere of God's Divine government. If it were certain that God would hereafter annihilate the incorrigible sinner, and that no further punishment need be feared, would there not cease to be any distinction between small or great sins as soon as a certain condition of soul had been reached? The sinner, convinced that he has forfeited salvation, and that he will be wiped out of existence, would probably continue in sin and rebellion against God, and thus triumph over God. Indeed he might be conceived as rejoicing at his success in having conquered God.

The moral effect, therefore, of such a doctrine would be simply disastrous and fatal. It would have anything but a constraining influence upon human life. There are natures who, if they had nothing to fear but future extinction, would go to any length in their career of vice and defiance of moral laws. It is the vague sense of the possibility of the truth of the Christian doctrine which now keeps them within bounds, supported, as it unquestionably is, by the witness of the individual conscience, however faint and in-

distinct. And even supposing God imposed upon such natures an increased punishment in the sphere of this present life, would it not still be within the sinner's power to terminate that punishment by suicide, and thus to outwit and defy God ?

V.

*Will not the Thought of Hell destroy
the Happiness of Heaven?*

It is contended that if Hell means misery and ruin for the lost, Heaven cannot possibly mean peace and happiness for the saved. Earthly affections are scarcely likely to be severed by the change which we call death. If our complex and undivided individuality survives that shock, memory too is bound to survive it. And in Heaven memory will be occupied with the thought of Hell. It will busy itself with the destiny of the lost. Looking, as it is bound to look, at the purely human aspect of the matter, it will awaken feelings of grief and sorrow at the severity of their punishment, and the hopelessness of their lot. The husband will mourn for his wife, a mother for her children, the friend for his friend. Human sympathy and love, indeed, would produce this feeling in any one of us on behalf of the lowest and most degraded of our fellow-men. And with this

sense of separation, and of hopeless loss, how can there be for us real and unalloyed happiness in Heaven? Would not memory, like a dark shadow, hover over our life and destroy for us anything like a real and deep joy? Under such sad and sorrowful conditions would not the saintliest soul weary of the very greatest bliss of Heaven?

It cannot be denied that the difficulty which is thus apt to formulate itself is a very real and formidable one. It is experienced by many thoughtful and right-minded persons who fully accept the doctrine of Hell, and, at first sight, it would seem to be almost unanswerable.

But, in fairly considering this objection, two important considerations have to be borne in mind. The first has already been pointed out, and is indeed one which we have constantly to remember in weighing the manifold difficulties surrounding this deeply important subject. Punishment and condemnation are not God's arbitrary act. They are the inevitable sequence of the action of cause and effect, the necessary result of our own thoughts and deeds. They

have their foundation in the fundamental laws which govern the moral universe. It is no mere figure of speech to say that each man creates for himself his own Heaven or his own Hell. Throughout the entire period of his life on earth, from the cradle to the grave, he is steadily gravitating either the one way or the other. And when he dies, his sentence is practically already pronounced. God is not likely to put him amidst environments with which he has no affinity, and with the condition of which his moral nature is not in correspondence. The action of this law may be distinctly traced in this present world and, on the whole, it can scarcely be said to offend our moral judgment. On the contrary, there is a sense in which we acknowledge its righteousness, and in which we apply it ourselves in the affairs of our social and public life. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how any order in the affairs of life would be possible without it. The criminal is not entrusted with the government of the people, or with any high office, even though he may possess all the intellectual gifts and endowments

necessary for such a post, and we may know his moral state to be due to early neglect, or to some one overpowering passion rather than to any distinctly evil disposition. It is no particular written law which excludes him, but he excludes himself. He is out of harmony with that moral sphere which is part of the high office in question. And his occupation of it would be a violation of that law of fitness, vaguely perhaps, but still universally, perceived and acknowledged.

And in this sense we may certainly be said to recognise the justice and fitness underlying the doctrine of Hell already now. We have our intellectual difficulties, it is true. We rebel against this conception of Hell or the other. We scarcely know how to formulate what we really think. Still, that vague sense of fitness is there. It already now governs our moral being, and it is engraved upon the very fibres of our souls ? There is, moreover, that deliberate inward conviction, deeply impressed upon the Christian consciousness, that, though there be a Hell and infinite punishment, yet the Judge of the earth will do right.

There are, of course, those who have played tricks with their conscience, and for whom it is no longer a Divine witness, who have honestly ceased to believe in Hell. There are, on the other hand, those who, by affecting a certain outward calm, succeed in hiding away the disquietude of their troubled and tortured minds. The world has more ways than one of forgetting, or of getting rid of, an inconvenient truth. Still, the fact remains that thorough believers in Hell are on the whole strangely calm and composed in the face of so momentous a truth involving such fearful issues, and, to say the least, view the matter with comparative complacency and unconcern. Is it not because they are morally sure that somehow justice will be found to underlie all, and that no punishment will be inflicted upon man which he has not deserved, and for which he is not altogether responsible?

In the second place, we have to bear in mind that at present our faculties of discernment are imperfect and limited. We cannot see as God sees. With our finite intellects we cannot hope to fully grasp a doctrine which is part of a Divine

Revelation. If we could, it would cease to be a Divine thing emanating from the supernatural sphere. We cannot even fully grasp a single fact or ascertained law of science. The real secret underlying it escapes us. How can we expect to understand the secrets of a sphere into which we have not yet entered, and with which we are only in a measure in correspondence? It is clearly essential to our well-being that we should know that there is a Hell; it may not be necessary that we should understand the "how," or be able to fit it in with our present knowledge of things. It is almost certain that we would not understand had some more explicit communication been made to us.

Again, it is conceivable that the affections of earth will experience a considerable change when we shall learn to distinguish between divine and human love, and when we see things in their right proportions. We love a person here, on earth, because of that person's character and perfections. But we may be grievously mistaken, and regard that as virtue which, from

the Divine standpoint, is not virtue at all, but self-love and selfishness. A perverted nature may, as we all know, be incited to love even by vice.

We cannot, for instance, conceive of a saint loving those whose inner nature is alienated from God, and whose character, however attractive from the human point of view, has no beauty or attractiveness from God's point of view. He could not love them any longer, since God loves them no longer. Here on earth, it is true, we cannot form an accurate judgment of any character, and cannot, therefore, say that this person or the other has reached a condition of soul which renders him no longer worthy of esteem and love. We experience a difficulty in conceiving of a fixed and final state of the soul. We look upon every person as capable of improvement, and here and now Christianity extends its arms of mercy to the most debased and unworthy of men. It is our duty, therefore, to exercise active love towards every man, even though he may have forfeited all claim to our respect. But the case must surely be far

different in the other world, and after the Judgment. Earthly love there will have changed its character, and will have become ennobled. It will view all things in a changed light, and from the standpoint of a wider knowledge and a more perfect discernment. And it is surely conceivable that, in the light of that perfect love, the soul's nature will experience such a radical transformation that the attachment and affections of earth will no longer hinder its most perfect peace, and its enjoyment of unalloyed happiness.

Again, the Giver of memory might, after death, blot out from the memory of the blessed all recollection of their past earth life, and thus mercifully sever the bonds which still tie the soul to the past, and perhaps impede its perfect emancipation. Would not such an act be in a thousand instances an act of Divine love and mercy ? The wisdom of God surely may have more ways than one of overcoming the difficulty here suggested, without in any wise diminishing the fulness of the soul's life.

VI.

*Why does God create Beings whose
Eternal Misery He must be able
to foresee?*

THIS is perhaps the most weighty of all the objections which can be urged against the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. Sin, many are ready to admit, may in some unknown and mysterious way introduce an element into the moral universe which disturbs its harmony and destroys its beauty. From the standpoint of the other world, it may be both just and reasonable that the author of the mischief, having introduced it of his own free will, should be permanently excluded from the sphere of the highest beauty and the purest light. But this does not solve the real difficulty of the matter. The fact remains, that however just and righteous the law which thus permanently punishes the transgressor, the punishment is inflicted, and it is terrible and cruel in its character. If the laws of the created

universe made the infliction of such a punishment a moral necessity, was there a similar moral necessity for calling man into being? Why was he created at all, seeing that the end of his existence is suffering and anguish? Why does not the Creator, being just and merciful, and foreseeing, as of course He must be able to foresee, His creature's failure and fall, and consequently his unceasing misery, abstain from calling it into conscious life? Why does He cause him to pass through a probation, the issues of which are already fully known to Him? What, indeed, is the object of imposing a probation at all? Is it not an unnecessary and additional means of inflicting pain and punishment, of awakening hopes which are destined never to be fulfilled, and aspirations which are certain to be quenched in eternal misery and despair?

The mind is awed and overwhelmed in contemplating these questions and difficulties, and yet they can scarcely fail to suggest themselves. We know that they do suggest themselves to many very thoughtful and devout minds,

and nothing is gained by treating them lightly, or by perhaps ignoring them altogether. They have their foundation in the very inmost depths of our moral nature, and it is a relief to face them and to formulate them, even if we cannot answer them to our satisfaction, or fully penetrate the mystery which prompts them.

But it will be admitted that the difficulty has thus been stated in its most extreme and severe form and, in viewing it fairly and fully, one very important consideration has to be borne in mind. It is no mere begging the question to say that, from the constitution of our nature, we cannot possibly expect to be able to solve the mystery of the universe. Our intellects are finite and limited, and we are all distinctly conscious of this limitation. We can thus never hope to understand why man or anything was created, or, indeed, why God exists. We are certain that these things lie beyond our ken. Now, clearly, any attempt to answer the question under consideration in such a way as to really satisfy the intellect involves these other questions as to the central

mystery of life and the object of our existence. We cannot ask one without asking the other. To answer that man was created to glorify God may satisfy our religious feelings, but it cannot, and does not, satisfy the craving of our intellects. Strictly speaking, it explains nothing at all; for the further question might then, and without irreverence, be asked: Why does God exist, and, if He exists, why, and in what way is His glory increased by our existence?

But man does exist, and is conscious of his existence without being able to explain it. And God exists, and the normal man is both morally and intellectually convinced of His existence without being able to explain it. And the same intuition which imparts the knowledge that God is, also imparts the conviction that the origin and mystery of His existence is unfathomable. There is a distinct consciousness that, in this direction, no progress can ever be made in our knowledge and perception—that in our present state we shall never penetrate the mystery. It brings us

face to face with our finiteness, which no increase of wisdom and learning, and no deepening of our moral perception can remove.

Now the difficulty formulated at the head of this chapter is surely of this order. To solve it would be to solve the mystery of life, and to know as God knows, to become possessed of superhuman faculties. We are not evading the difficulty, therefore, when we acknowledge our utter helplessness and ignorance in this matter, and the conscious limitations of our mental nature. All we can do is to reason from the known to the unknown, and to discover, if we can, analogies between God's method of action as we know it, and His revealed method of action in the life that is to be.

And what is God's method of action in the visible universe? The larger number of mankind are born to a life of suffering and of pain, both physical and moral. In innumerable instances they bring with them into life the seeds of terrible and incurable disease, which exclude the very possibility of any kind of real enjoyment. In other instances, physical

and mental suffering are induced later on in life through negligence and ignorance, or, it may be, in consequence of deliberate transgression of known laws. So far as our judgment goes, the individual is, in very many cases, less responsible for this state of things than what we term "circumstances." But the pain and the suffering exist, and, whatever our theories respecting its origin, the Author of life must have foreseen it, must have known that in calling man into existence He exposed him to the possibility of extreme and prolonged suffering. And yet He created man. His fore-knowledge respecting a world of anguish and of woe did not prevent His calling that world into being. A moment's reflection brings us face to face with the difficulty and the profound mystery which underlies it. There are few of us who have not given expression to our sense of it when confronted by some painful episode of life. We are utterly incapable of reconciling it with our instinctive notions of God's goodness and justice, and yet we continue to believe in that goodness and justice. An indescribable

something within us tells us that there is a solution somewhere, and that they can be reconciled.

But the fact remains that God, although He knew that by creating man He exposed him to the possibility of perpetual suffering, nevertheless created him. Now, if this be manifestly God's action here, why not there? If in passing into conscious existence terrible risks respecting the natural life are incurred by the creature, why not equal risks respecting the supernatural life? Bearing in mind the unity of nature and of nature's laws, is it not more than probable that the law pertains to both states? The risks incurred may, for all we know, be the necessary adjuncts of the gift of conscious life.

We do not understand now; but it is conceivable that we shall have no difficulty in understanding when we enjoy enlarged faculties, and know a little more of the Creator's purpose in the universe. "I can see nothing," says Prof. Jevons,* "to forbid the notion that in a

* "Principles of Science," vol. ii. p. 48.

higher state of intelligence much that is now obscure may become clear. We perpetually find ourselves in the position of finite minds attempting problems, and can we be sure that where we see contradiction, an infinite intelligence might not discover perfect logical harmony?"

At any rate, it must be admitted that the moral difficulty involved in the question now formulated is no greater than that constantly facing us in the known and undeniable facts of our present life.

And in the sphere of our own finite human existence can we, by our foreknowledge, always save our fellow-creatures from suffering and pain? We too, are, in a lower sense, creators of life; it lies within the power of our wills to be instrumental in calling other human beings into existence. We are fully conscious that, with the imparting of life, grave risks and perils are incurred. Our children may be born with healthy bodies and minds, and may have every faculty for enjoying life; but they may also be born with crippled bodies and defective minds, and their course, from the cradle to the

grave, may be one long period of anguish. Indeed, in some instances, parents are absolutely certain, they have the positive foreknowledge, that their children will be born with the germs of incurable disease in their bodies, and that, in giving them physical life, they expose them to the risks of perpetual bodily or mental suffering. Do they on that account abstain from calling those children into being? Does their foreknowledge abrogate that law of necessity which seems to underlie the world of phenomena and of conscious life?

Reflection, therefore, makes us recognise two facts :—

(1) The difficulty suggested involves a mystery which, by the constitution of our nature, we cannot possibly hope to fathom.

(2) God's revealed method of action, in the sphere of the spiritual universe, is in perfect harmony with His known method of action in the sphere of the physical universe.

This may not help us much; but it is clearly as far as we can hope to get in an enquiry of this kind. To show that the laws of Revelation,

however difficult to understand, are reflected in the laws of Nature which we do understand in a measure, is something gained.

Two very important points deserve our consideration :—

(1) For all *practical* purposes the difficulty suggested does not exist. We can be absolutely certain that God's foreknowledge respecting our destiny does not in any way affect or limit His action upon our moral nature. The thought is not contained in the New Testament. Hell and its punishments are constantly declared to be of man's, not of God's, making : the inevitable result of our moral freedom. The Christian Revelation does not justify us in conceiving of God as creating a world containing a place of eternal torment for rebellious creatures, and of then creating those creatures in order that they may inhabit that place of torment, but of creating man with every power and faculty for enjoying perfect happiness both here and hereafter. And it is clearly God's *desire* that man should be eternally happy.

He expressly and repeatedly declares, both in the Old Testament and in the New, that He has no pleasure in the death of a wicked man, that He would infinitely rather see him turn from his wickedness and live, and that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over a repentant sinner. He has made exceptional and marvellous provision for the effacement of sin, and for enabling the most confirmed transgressor to become restored to His favour. He is, by the mouth of His Christ, and of the Apostles, incessantly making the most touching appeals to the hearts of men to choose the way of life rather than the way of death. He has provided supernatural means which are to aid the soul in gaining the victory over its greatest and most dangerous weaknesses. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit alone implies a constant action on God's part in the sphere of the soul's life. And it cannot be denied that these statements of the New Testament respecting God's continued action are most fully and constantly borne out by the facts of our own personal moral experience.

(2) We can, in the second place, be absolutely certain that God's foreknowledge respecting our destiny does not in any way affect or limit our moral freedom.

However great our intellectual difficulty in reconciling the two, we may be quite sure that our power of making a free choice remains intact. We *know* that we may, at any given moment, exercise that power, if we will, in any given direction. There are influences at work, no doubt, in determining our choice ; there are circumstances and personal inclination to be reckoned with, a host of subtle forces inclining our wills and affecting our judgment, but it is certain that we may, by a powerful effort of the will, act directly contrary to them all, and allow a higher motive and impulse to set them aside.

The experiences of life constantly bear witness to the truth of this assertion, which any person may test for himself. We are certain that we can, at any particular moment, deliberately choose a path of life, and enter upon a course of action wholly contrary to our former

habits of mind and judgment, and solely for the purpose of ascertaining the illimitability of our individual moral freedom.

Our sense, therefore, of the fact of God's foreknowledge clearly does not decrease our personal responsibility. That responsibility must, of necessity, remain so long as we know ourselves to be morally free. And we know that, although God inclines and disposes our wills, He does not coerce them. We are to *desire* our own happiness, and to make a supreme effort towards its attainment, not to be forced into it. As St Augustine says: "He who made us without ourselves will not save us without *ourselves*." And, as another writer adds: "It is difficult to see how He could do so conformably with the laws of the nature He has given us." For it must be remembered that, while the blessing is from God, the curse is from man himself. It is not as when the first creative fiat of Almighty Charity was breathed over the stillness of the dead eternities to call light and life and harmony out of chaos. This time the fiat of eternal death issues from the will, not of

the Creator, but of the creature, who has preferred darkness to light, and has deliberately rejected the Love that wooed but failed to win him. Most entirely would I repeat and make my own the words with which Faber closes his discussion of the relative numbers of the saved : "As to those who may be lost, I confidently believe that our Heavenly Father threw His arms around each created spirit, and looked it full in the face with bright eyes of love in the darkness of its mortal life, and that of its once deliberate will it would not have Him."* Or as another writer puts it: "If there is one thing that is certain, it is this—that no one will ever be punished with the positive punishment of the life to come who has not, with full knowledge and complete consciousness and full consent, turned his back upon Almighty God."†

* Faber, "Creator and Creature," p. 368.

† *Dublin Review* (1881).

THE PERSONALITY OF THE DEVIL

IF the orthodox doctrine of Hell is a necessary part of the Christian Revelation, it is certain that the doctrine of the existence and personality of the Devil is no less so. "It is scarcely conceivable that any honest believer in Revelation should question—certainly no disbeliever would for a moment doubt—what is, in fact, the teaching of the Bible on this subject, reiterated in a variety of forms, and with unmistakable emphasis, in every book from Genesis to the Apocalypse." What Christ clearly taught throughout the entire course of His ministry is, that an individual malevolent Power, ruling over a world of evil and darkness, and capable of directing the human will, and of affecting and influencing the human character, and having

for his aim the moral ruin of mankind, is engaged in a fierce and persistent and never-ceasing conflict with the world of goodness and of truth. This, in simple language, is the orthodox doctrine of the Devil, which has been the belief of the Christian world for many centuries, and without which the statements contained in the Sacred Writings are simply unintelligible.

That this doctrine, too, should be assailed and denied in the present day need not cause any astonishment to thoughtful persons. An age which dissolves the Personal God into a mere abstraction, and denies the supremacy of the human conscience, can scarcely be expected to believe in the personality of the Evil One. "Neither truth," as a writer already quoted very forcibly observes, "is compatible with a refusal to recognise the Christian idea of sin." And that idea has to be got rid of at any cost.

There can be little doubt that modern scientific theology is chiefly responsible for this attitude of mind. It has invariably shown a remarkable readiness to adapt itself to the

downward religious tendencies of the age, and to furnish the modern mind with good and apparently sound reasons for getting rid of the less convenient, and certainly unpalatable truths of the Christian Revelation. It does its work in a very subtle and cautious way. The accuracy of the Biblical statements referring to the existence and action of a Personal Devil are, for the most part, freely admitted, but they are interpreted in what is called the light of modern science, and of our fuller knowledge of ancient religious beliefs and conceptions. It is urged that belief in a second personal power in the universe, opposing himself to the Supreme Creator, and gaining, it would seem, in a thousand instances, a complete victory over Him, involves philosophical difficulties of an insuperable character. It seems much more probable that the Satan of the New Testament is the creature of man's own imagination, and much easier to believe with the modern liberal theologian that, born in the childhood of the human race, he has fed and nourished himself on man's natural fears and ignorances, and that

it is on utterly false pretences that he has attained to his present unreasonable and abnormal dimensions. May we not assume, moreover, that Christ, knowing the force and persistence of inherited religious ideas and beliefs, and the impossibility of effacing them during the few short years of His ministry, accommodated His teaching to the age in which He lived, and the people whom He taught, and that were He to appear in our own age, and witness our intellectual expansion, He would give a very different account of the matter.

Thus, modern theology traces for us the natural history of the Devil, from his very cradle through the New Testament days, and the "dark ages" of the Christian Church, right up to our own time, and is at this present moment busily engaged in digging his grave, and in burying him out of sight.

It is very interesting to observe how rapidly a destructive process of this kind advances on its course, and with what eagerness the human mind seizes upon any theory, however shallow and inconsistent, which is at all likely to free

it from the irksome restraints of an unwelcome and inconvenient truth. The doctrine of Hell and of Eternal Punishment abolished, it was but natural that the doctrine of the Personal Devil should follow suit, and after that who will be foolish enough to believe what Christ said about sin and about individual moral responsibility before God ?

But will this modern method of explaining away the deeper mystic element of the Christian teaching permanently satisfy really careful and consistent thinkers ? Will it suffice to answer those deeper questions which the inexplicable moral phenomena of life are so apt to awaken in the mind ? With the removal of the Devil will the shadow of the Evil One, and of his evil world, also be removed from the pathway of human life ? It is sometimes forgotten that there are truths which the awakened spiritual nature of man discerns quite independently of the dicta of any theologian, and that there is a sphere in which even the Devil does not leave himself without a witness.

Now, there is one very remarkable circum-

stance which is perhaps not very generally known, but which is certainly deserving of the most careful attention. It is an evident and steadily growing tendency, on the part of the most recent scientific thought on this and kindred subjects, to depart from the received "liberal view" of things, and to revert to the familiar position so long occupied by orthodox Christian theology.

It is not necessary here to enquire into the causes which have been instrumental in bringing about this very remarkable transformation of ideas. The unexpected achievements of modern psychical research are, no doubt, most largely responsible for it. Their importance and value are being increasingly recognised on every side, and it is more and more felt that they alone are likely to provide us with a key to those many problems of the moral life which have so long and so hopelessly perplexed science. But, whatever the cause, a kind of vague conviction is certainly gaining ground that somehow there is a serious flaw in the logic of modern theology, and that the orthodox

explanation of things is, after all, not half so unreasonable and unscientific as has hitherto been supposed. This is certainly intensely true with regard to the doctrine now under consideration.

Admitting, for instance, all the philosophical difficulties which the acceptance of the doctrine of the personal Devil involves, it cannot be denied that that doctrine remains the only rational and intelligible solution of the mystery of evil which we know to be at work in the world and in mankind, and it is unquestionably a theory which best and most fully explains the many extraordinary psychical phenomena by which we are continually confronted. A very suggestive writer has recently given expression to this thought in an exceedingly interesting work entitled "Evil and Evolution." It is an attempt to turn the light of modern science on the ancient mystery of evil, and the conclusions arrived at by this author are wholly in favour of the personal Devil as he is presented in the Sacred Scriptures. The writer points out that of the three possible theories respecting the origin of evil, the Biblical

is the best and only reasonable one. It is the one, we may safely add, most completely in accord with the discoveries of recent psychical science. "Assume," he says, "that the Creator had an absolutely perfect scheme, vast and intricate beyond all human thought, beautifully harmonised, delicately poised and adjusted down to its most minute detail, and all for the health and happiness of countless generations of life, and assume that a malignant intelligence brings all the resources of his malignity and intellect to the task of disturbing that nicety of balance and adjustment, and in the world around us you have exactly what might be expected." Or at another place: "What I am now trying to show is, that we are surrounded by manifestations of evil which there is no possibility of reconciling with any Providential government that is at the same time absolute in wisdom and goodness and almighty in power, and that none of the orthodox solutions of the riddle can be accepted, except the most orthodox of them all, the actual existence of Satan."

Those ardent enthusiasts to whom the old-

world beliefs are merely reflections of human weakness and ignorance, and who welcome in modern unbelief and disbelief the disenfranchisement of reason and intellect, are sometimes strangely illogical and inconsistent in their assumptions and reasonings. They are ready enough to proclaim the untenability of ideas involving, in their opinion, insuperable intellectual difficulties, but they seem to be quite unconscious of the fact that the difficulties they are thus introducing are really infinitely greater. The Devil removed from God's spiritual universe we can, by no subtlety of reasoning, escape the self-evident conclusion that the Creator Himself is responsible for the sin and misery of human life, and that He either cannot or will not prevent it. The very conception of perfect knowledge and almighty power involves that dreadful alternative, and it is one which, as most of us know, has forced itself upon many a reflecting mind, enveloping it in its blighting and dreary shadow. The riddle of the universe, instead of being solved, is thus made infinitely more in-

tricate and perplexing, and the mind, instead of being freed from an intolerable burden, is weighted with one which is heavier by far, and which it is a thousand times more difficult to bear.

A God unlimited in power, and knowing the unspeakable sufferings of His creatures, but unwilling to prevent them, is not the God whom Christ revealed, whom He declared to be working out the redemption of mankind, and seeking their release from some secondary and malignant power in the universe, but a cruel and heartless tyrant who cannot possibly hope to command the love and adoration of His creatures. A mind driven to the acceptance of such a God is bound sooner or later to experience a violent reaction, and, by a necessary process of thought, to seek refuge in some negative godless philosophy of life. "I believe," says the author already quoted, "that . . . to eliminate Satan is to make the moral chaos around us more chaotic, the darkness more impenetrable, the great riddle of the universe more hopelessly insoluble. So far from a belief in a Devil complicating matters, it is, to my mind, the only

condition upon which it is possible to believe in a beneficent God."

It is impossible to doubt that these sentiments will be echoed by numbers of really thoughtful but distressed minds, who have found themselves face to face with this great problem, and who have not been able to escape the dreadful alternative. Our unorthodox teachers who are determined to reconcile religion with natural science, as they understand it, cannot be aware of the fearful moral difficulties in which they involve earnest thinkers, and they certainly do not follow their flimsy theories to their legitimate and logical conclusion. "In the blindest of optimism," says the same author, "they are preaching a God of goodness and gentleness and love, while the real God, that science seems to be more and more revealing, is that horrid nightmare, the God of evolution, whose schemes have been drawn in lines of blood and tears, to whom nations are but dust beneath His feet, whose trusty ministers are war and pestilence and famine, whose laws are pitiless as death, and as irresistible as the storm."*

* "Evil and Evolution," p. 203.

And what are we to think of the words of Christ? How are we to reconcile such views with the character of Him in whose mouth there was no lie. If the language of men can convey any truth at all, His language surely conveyed the idea that there is a personal Devil, that he is our strongest and most dangerous enemy, and that one of our greatest perils lies in our natural disposition to ignore or disbelieve his existence. In any case, if Christ was God, surely He must have known whether there was a Devil or no. If He knew there was not, how could He have used language such as He did, seeing that He came, not to confirm man's ignorances and misbeliefs, but to remove and abolish them, and to teach him the truth concerning his soul and his soul's life. Here, too, liberal theology surely entangles us in a hopeless and bewildering maze out of which there is no rational and honourable way of escape.

But the widespread rejection of the doctrine of the personal Devil is probably far more due to that modern mania for what is scientific and liberal in thought, than to any inherent intel-

lectual difficulty presented by the doctrine itself. As a matter of fact, numbers of persons do not think very deeply about the subject at all, but are content to echo and to adopt the ideas and theories which happen to be the accepted and dominant ones for the time being. To the majority of men it is probably an intense relief to get rid of the Devil, and to get rid of him on the authority of their own appointed and authorised teachers. They certainly are not sufficiently interested in the matter to face the greater intellectual and moral difficulties which that denial involves. And it may be useful, therefore, to draw attention to the fact that these negative views which have found such ready favour and acceptance in the present day are being rapidly discredited in the best informed quarters, and by some of our most careful thinkers, and that all the results of the most recent research are tending in the very opposite direction. Science, at any rate, is clearly demonstrating the existence and continual action of intelligences external to man, and, in innumerable instances, fatally hostile to him.

This rapidly changing attitude of mind is even perceptible in the change which is creeping over the spirit of our current literature on this subject. Occultism is just now receiving an unprecedented measure of attention, and Monthly Reviews, and even sober Daily Papers, are found to discuss the question of Satanism and Satan worship with all seriousness. The testimony recently borne by M. Jules Bois, the author of "Le Satanisme and La Magie," and a great authority on this subject, is certainly extremely interesting and suggestive.

The familiar question: Why, then, does not God exercise His almighty power and destroy Satan? is one which we cannot hope and cannot be expected to answer. It touches that fundamental secret of the universe which lies beyond our ken. We might ask the further question: Why does not God destroy us when we sin? why does He tolerate evil at all? It is conceivable that to destroy it and Satan would be contrary to the fixed laws of the moral universe, and would mean the destruction

of man's free will in the inscrutable mystery of which evil originated.

For the same reason, belief in the existence of the Devil cannot be said to lay upon us the necessity of accounting for the "how" of his existence. We believe in God without being able, and without ever hoping to be able, in any sense to fathom the mystery of His being. We believe in Him because we trace His action both in the physical universe and in the hidden world of our inner life. In the same way there is nothing against reason in acknowledging the existence and action of a Personal Evil Power, even though we are unable scientifically to explain his origin and the "how" of his existence. The scriptural explanation is both a reasonable and a sufficient one, and it is accepted where prejudice and a false method of philosophy have not barred the way.

"How Satan exists," writes a well-known theologian,* "or where at the present time or how his power avails, as we are told it

* Rev. C. Reichel, B.D., "The Lord's Prayer."

does, to contrive to suggest temptation to the mind of man, and to what extent he is aware of what is passing in men's minds, so as to adapt his suggestions to their weakness, we are not told, and do not therefore know. But our not being told the manner in which his power is being exercised and brought to bear, is no proof of the unreality of that fearful being who is everywhere in the New Testament exhibited as the adversary of God and goodness, whether in the individual or in the development of the human race."

But it is impossible to sum up the argument of this chapter in clearer and more effective language than that employed by the author of "Evil and Evolution." "If you admit," he says, "the creative power and the beneficence of God, I cannot for the life of me see why you may not admit the possibility of the existence, the power, and the malevolence of a devil, and I maintain that all the probabilities are in favour of the assumption that the maladjustments in the scheme of creation are

due to the agency of Satan, and are in no way to be ascribed either to the indifference or the insufficiency, or, worse than all, to the deliberate purpose of the Creator. That there is a conflict between good and evil raging all around us and within us is only too evident."

MANIFESTATIONS OF A TRANSCENDENTAL EVIL WORLD

IT is a most remarkable circumstance that, concurrently with the growth of the modern school of destructive theology, there has arisen a movement of thought which is tending in a very different and, indeed, opposite direction. This movement has now been going on for a considerable number of years ; it is counting amongst its adherents some of the most prominent men in science and in literature, and it is beginning to permeate almost all classes and conditions of society. Its origin is due to the occurrence of very extraordinary physical and mental phenomena, inexplicable on the known laws of natural science, and its aim is the scientific demonstration of the existence amongst us, and continual action of an unseen spiritual universe.

The phenomena themselves are now too well known to call for any detailed description or comment. They have been observed by persons of very varying degrees of intellectual culture, and of social standing, and the testimony respecting them is practically unanimous. They are vouched for by some of the most eminent scientific men of this generation. Indeed, so exceptionally strong is the evidence in favour of their occurrence, that to refuse credence can no longer be regarded as a sign of superior intellectual strength, but of being very imperfectly informed. A study of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* can scarcely fail to carry conviction to any really unprejudiced mind. "The testimony to these extraordinary phenomena," wrote the late Professor of Astronomy at Cambridge, some years ago, "has been so abundant and spontaneous that either the facts must be admitted to be such as reported, or the possibility of certifying facts by human testimony must be given up." "What I am prepared to assert, from my own experience," said another well-known scientific man in a public lecture, a

little time ago, "is, that neither hallucination, imposture, malobservation, misdescription, nor any other well recognised cause can account for the phenomena I have witnessed, and that the simplest information is the spirit hypothesis.*

The testimony of Professor Alfred Russell Wallace is, if possible, still more deliberate and emphatic,

There are, of course, and I suppose there always will be, some few persons who resolutely refuse to credit the evidence in favour of the existence of a spirit world, who have made up their minds that it cannot exist, or, if it exists, that it cannot manifest itself in any perceptible way. But it is not really necessary that we should trouble ourselves about such sceptics. An attitude of that kind is probably due to a peculiarity of temperament rather than to any other cause. There is such a thing as the *wish* not to be convinced, and there are persons of whom we were told by One greater than man,

* From an address delivered in St James' Hall by the Professor of Experimental Physics in the Royal College of Science in Ireland (W. F. Barrett).

"that they would not believe though one rose from the dead." Such persons are scarcely likely to be interested in an enquiry of this kind at all, and it cannot therefore make any difference whether they acknowledge the truths of Spiritism or whether they do not. And we are not here concerned with the phenomena themselves, with questions of conditions and evidence, etc., but with their tendency and character, and the light they may be said to throw upon the difficult and mysterious subject under consideration.

Now, it may with justice be urged that at present the enquiry has scarcely gone far enough to enable us to draw any reliable deduction or inference. It is quite true that psychical science, in its modern development, is still in its infancy, and premature dogmatising would therefore be both unfair and unsafe. Still, it is admitted by those really best informed on the subject, that the phenomena, so far as they have now been studied, are attended by one very peculiar and persistent characteristic:—THEY ARE ALMOST ALWAYS EVIL IN THEIR AIM AND

TENDENCY. It has been found quite impossible to ignore this transparent fact. It is practically admitted by both scientific and unscientific enquirers, and all modern spiritistic literature is full of it. Indeed, there are few persons who do not know, or have not heard of, some enquirers who, after a period of great devotion to the cause, and of earnest, painstaking investigation, have abandoned it because of the evils and perils which have been found to attend it. There are at this present moment numerous families in England who could tell tales of utter misery and sorrow brought on through the spiritistic séance, and through intercourse with the mysterious agents which attend it. Spiritism, beyond doubt, is at this present time working unspeakable mischief and moral evil in a thousand homes, both here and in other countries.

It is utterly useless to deny all this. The evidence is too clear and abundant to be resisted, and it is increasing day by day. The evil element, as thousands know to their cost, has a way of hiding itself at the outset; it is

even apt to remain concealed throughout many years of enquiry, but an hour or a moment almost always comes when it shows itself, either by some subtle and pernicious influence exercised upon the unsuspecting mind, or in some other more direct and startling manner.

Many spiritualists who have committed themselves to the cause, and who are determined to see in it the rise and dawn of a new religion effacing the time-worn Christian Creed, show a strange indication to ignore this striking fact; others explain it on a plausible theory propounded by the spirits themselves, but none can, or do, deny it.

According to this spirit theory, man is in a condition of progressive development, which, begun here on earth, is continued after death, and possibly throughout many ages, until the moral nature is refined, and the character transformed. In this process of development, death is not a final point reached, a destiny attained and completed, but a mere unimportant incident or episode, in no wise affecting the progressive evolution or destiny of the individual concerned.

The larger proportion of mankind, being sensual and earthly in their feelings and tendencies, of necessity remain, after physical death, in a low and earthly sphere until they are purified, either by initiation within themselves of new and upward aspirations, or by the instruction and helpful influence of other spirits descending to them from some higher and purer plane of existence. Each individual person is already here on earth moving in a sphere inhabited by spirits of a corresponding nature and disposition, with whom he is in rapport and affinity, and it is this sphere which obtrudes itself upon him when he is, through the various forms of mediumship, seeking actual sensible intercourse with the spirit world. In this actual intercourse, persons of good and elevated mind and feeling "draw" good and elevated spirits, and persons of low and sensual disposition attract low and undeveloped intelligences. The manifestation, at the *séance*, of evil spirits is, therefore, a thing to be expected —evidence simply of the fact, that life in the unseen is not so very different from life in the

seen, and that the evil spirits who thus come to us are but our own wicked earth-friends and fellow-men, minus their physical bodies.

This theory of progressive development has proved most seductive to many minds, disposing as it does of the unattractive and old-fashioned Christian Creed, and having about it, as it undoubtedly has, a certain kind of robust reasonableness. Its peculiar danger probably lies in the fact that it is a half truth, or, at any rate, that it contains some grains of truth.* It has, however, two very striking defects :—

- (1) It does not fit the facts which recent research is continually bringing to light, and
- (2) It is contradicted by the entire spirit and tenor of the Christian teaching.†

And as the present enquiry is concerned with a doctrine which is part of that teaching, and is an effort to aid those who acknowledge its authority and Divine origin, it is unneces-

* See Objections and Difficulties Considered, Section III.

† See "Spiritualism : Its Character and Results," by the Rev. R. F. Clarke ; and see "Lectures on Spiritualism," by the Rev. Edward White.

sary to enter upon this aspect of the matter, and to discuss theories. The occurrence of the phenomena being admitted, we are concerned with the question whether they can be said to throw any light upon the subject here under consideration. This question may certainly be answered in the affirmative, for a careful examination of the incontrovertible scientific evidence available demonstrates two things:—

(1) THE EXISTENCE OF TRANSCENDENTAL HUMAN
BEINGS OF AN EVIL NATURE.

This fact, as already pointed out, is admitted by all really experienced spiritualists, and the admission is sufficient for our purpose. It demonstrates that evil and evil beings can, and do, exist in the unseen. Whether these beings be in a condition of progressive development, or whether they have reached a fixed and final state of existence, is a question with which we need not concern ourselves here. The evidence available at this present time certainly points in the latter direction. In most instances these spirits

are apparently what they claim to be, *i.e.* human beings freed from their physical bodies. They are familiar with the conditions of our earth life, they understand our language, our modes of thought and expression, and certainly show all the characteristics which we expect to find in ordinary human beings. Many of these spirits, communicating through mediums, are in the habit of talking a good deal about progress, but there is no sign whatever that they themselves are progressing. There are instances in which the same intelligences have communicated through the same medium for a number of years, but their tone and moral character have remained practically unchanged. They are as absurd and frivolous and mischievous now as they were when they first gave evidence of their presence. When hard pressed, they almost always admit that they are utterly unhappy and miserable, and they invariably request that prayers should be offered on their behalf, even though they appear to be quite ignorant as to whether these prayers are likely to avail them or not. The communications received from

these "familiar spirits," although sometimes very high flown and lofty in their tone, are not such as we might reasonably expect from beings who are imbued with a sense of the seriousness of life, and whose moral condition is one of progressive development. They have all the appearance of emanating from fallen intelligences who have missed the aim of life, and who are somehow conscious that for them the day of grace is past.

Another evidence of the evil character of these intelligences is their constant attempts at deception and personation. This is probably one of the most familiar and well-known characteristics of the phenomena of modern spiritism. It can be traced throughout its entire literature of both past and present times, and no experienced spiritualist denies it. The amazing thing is, that this peculiar characteristic too does not disconcert them, but that, on the contrary, they make every effort to ignore it or to explain it away. Several instances of the most heartless and cruel deception of this kind are known to the present writer, and if a

record were made of such cases, there is not a spiritualist in the world who could not from his own experience contribute liberally towards it.

In some instances deceased relatives are personated in a manner exhibiting so much ingenuity, and such intimate acquaintance with their past history and their mode of thought, that the most careful and cautious enquirer is apt to be deceived. Unhappily, in the majority of cases, the deception is only discovered when it is too late, and when unspeakable mischief has already been wrought. Indeed, so well-known is this deliberate attempt of the spirits to deceive, that a theory has recently been suggested which seeks to explain the phenomenon by the action of a sub-conscious faculty of the enquirer's own mind, set to work in some occult and mysterious way. And it is surely highly instructive and suggestive to read what so great an authority as Professor Alfred Russell Wallace thinks on this subject. Speaking of the theory of the second self, he says: "The stupendous difficulty—that, if these phenomena and these tests are to be all attributed to the

‘second self’ of living persons, then that second self is almost always a deceiving and a lying self, however moral and truthful the visible and tangible first self may be—has, so far as I know, never been rationally explained ; yet this cumbrous and unintelligible hypothesis finds great favour with those who have always been accustomed to regard the belief in a spirit-world, and more particularly a belief that the spirits of our dead friends can, and do, sometimes communicate with us, as unscientific, unphilosophical and superstitious.” *

It will be seen that, in thus combating a theory which he considers untenable and unscientific, the Professor incidently admits that the spirits communicating are almost always lying and deceiving spirits. Such an admission, coming from so great a scientific authority, and from so ardent a defender of the truths of spiritism, is of exceptional significance, and requires no comment. Nor could the experiences of other less qualified enquirers, deeply interesting though some of them may be, add to

* From a Paper read before the Chicago Congress.

the force and value of the evidence thus offered.

The evil nature and disposition of these transcendental beings is further evident from the subtle influence they are apt to exercise upon the minds of enquirers. It is not too much to say, that this influence is almost always demoralising in its tendency. Its peculiar danger lies in the fact that it is so subtle in its operations that it may continue for years, while the victim himself may be quite unconscious of it. In some instances any suggestion of such an influence being exercised is vehemently denied by the persons concerned, even though the fact may be fully apparent to any outside observer. Numerous instances might be adduced to demonstrate the truth of this assertion. Sometimes this demoralising influence is exhibited in a general loss of moral tone, and of the sense of moral responsibility, the individual's mind becoming wholly dominated by the thoughts and ideas of the particular intelligence controlling it, and obeying its every suggestion and prompting.

Sometimes the instinctive delicate faculty of being able to distinguish between right and wrong is either paralysed or perverted, and a complete transformation of the temperament and moral character are effected. In other instances an indescribable weariness of life, prompting to despondency and self-destruction, are the characteristic symptoms. The present writer has had occasion to observe several cases of this kind. The Rev. R. F. Clarke, who has devoted much time and thought to this aspect of the subject, writes as follows: "Intercourse with the spirits is, in this respect in the moral world, what eating opium is in the physical world. Opium destroys the healthy action of the natural powers, and the attenuated frame and feeble gait soon bear witness to the ruinous effect of the poisonous drug, that at first produced such delicious and soothing effects. So it is with spiritualism. At first the eagerness of awakened curiosity, and the sweetness of the forbidden fruit, then a sort of paralysis of the spiritual power, inability to make any advance, disgust and depression

which the miserable victim seeks in vain to avert by a still closer intercourse with the world of spirits. . . . One other consequence follows occasionally from this dealing with the spirits, and that is a rush of abominable and wicked imaginations. One authentic instance I have heard of, in which this was happily the means of inducing a young Protestant lady to give up the practice of spiritualism. In another case it was not merely evil thoughts that were suggested by the spirits; they led on those who had intercourse with them to evil actions also."

But as the force of statements emanating from the quarter represented by this author are apt to be diminished by the charge of bigotry and religious prejudice, it may be well to quote what a professor of physical science says on the subject:—

"Of course," writes Professor Barrett, "it is true now, as then, that these practices are dangerous in proportion as they lead us to surrender our reason, or our will, to the dictates of an invisible and oftentimes masquerading

spirit, or as they absorb and engross us to the neglect of our daily duties, or as they tempt us to forsake the sure but arduous pathway of knowledge and of progress for an enticing maze, which lures us round and round."* Or as the Professor said in his lecture delivered at St James' Hall, and already quoted : " As regards spiritualism, I, for one, recognise that there are certain dangers, and we do well to be on our guard against them. These dangers do not apply to a purely scientific investigation of the phenomena, but seriously affect those who, from idle curiosity, venture upon these treacherous psychical quicksands, or attempt to build a faith upon the same insecure foundation."

It is surely impossible to overrate the weight of these warnings coming as they do from so eminent an authority, who has been a patient and painstaking student of the subject for a number of years, and who views it, not from the standpoint of a narrow sectarianism, but

*"Necromancy and Ancient Magic in its Relation to Spiritualism," by Professor W. F. Barrett.

from that of physical science, and who, we may fairly suppose, started on his enquiry with no preconceived idea or prejudice on the subject. They will be echoed by all who have an accurate acquaintance with the subject.

The evidence available further demonstrates:—

(2) THE EXISTENCE OF DEMONS—THAT IS, OF
BEINGS UTTERLY DEVOID OF ALL MORAL
FEELING AND DIABOLICAL IN THEIR AIM
AND NATURE.

Here again we have scientific evidence of an unimpeachable character. "The views I entertain," said Professor Barrett in his lecture, "of the probable source of the purely physical manifestations may be wholly erroneous, but, holding those views, and also a belief in the historical records of Christianity, it seems to me that the Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, points to a race of spiritual creatures similar to those I have described, but of a malignant type, when he speaks of beings not made of flesh and blood inhabiting the air around us, and able injuriously to affect man-

kind. At any rate, all must admit the wide learning and profound spiritual insight of the great Apostle, and that, granting the existence of a spiritual world, it is necessary to be on our guard against the invasion of our will by a lower order of intelligence and morality." Or, as he says, in speaking of a case resembling obsession, and reported in "*Light*" for 2nd and 9th May 1896 : "Possibly this is an instance of duplex personality ; more probably I think it is, what it purports to be, a lower influence, or 'spirit,' acting through the medium. Evil as well as good agencies doubtless exist in the unseen ; this is equally true if the phenomena are, or are not, due to those who have once lived on the earth. . . . The danger lies, in my opinion, not only in the loss of spiritual stamina, but in the possible disintegration of our personality, in the liability to lose that birthright we each are given to cherish, our individuality, our true self-hood, just as in another way this may be impaired by sensuality, opium, or alcohol." *

A very interesting letter on "Demonic"

* "Necromancy and Ancient Magic."

Control," by Professor James, of Harvard University, appeared in an issue of the spiritistic journal, "*Light*," of 1st May 1897. In this letter the Professor repeats some remarks which he had made in a lecture on this subject delivered some time before, and which had evidently been misunderstood or misreported by the Press. "I stood up," he says, "for it (demonic possession) on historic grounds as a definite type of affliction, very widespread in place and time, and characterised by definite symptoms, the chief of which are these: The subject is attacked at intervals for short periods, a few hours at most, and between whiles is perfectly sane and well. During the attack the character, voice, and consciousness are changed, the subject assuming a new name, and speaking of his natural self in the third person. The new name may, in Christian countries, be that of a demon or spirit, elsewhere it may be that of a god, and the action and speech are frequently blasphemous or absurd. When the attack passes off, the subject usually remembers nothing of it. He may manifest during it a tendency to fore-

tell the future, to reveal facts at a distance, profess to understand foreign languages, sometimes speak them, and prescribe for diseases. The affection may be developed by the example of others similarly possessed. In all these respects it resembles the mediumship which is so common at the present day. If one is genuine, the other is, and they must be tested by the same rule. . . . I contented myself with rehabilitating ‘demoniac possession’ as a genuine phenomena instead of the imposture or delusion which at the present day it is popularly supposed to be.”

Commenting on this letter “*Light*”* says in a leading article: “The more spirit possession of any kind is proved the better we are pleased, and we are particularly gratified when, in any direction, the old charges of ‘superstition,’ ‘imposture,’ ‘delusion’ and the like are reputed, and when such truth-loving and competent men as Professor James give back to orthodoxy its beloved demons.”

This is surely remarkable and striking testi-

* 8th May 1897.

mony considering the quarter from which it emanates, and it can scarcely fail to awaken thoughtful reflection in the minds of those who have accustomed themselves to treat the matter lightly. It is well known to persons intimately acquainted with the subject that the influence exercised by these possessing demons is, in some instances, absolutely diabolical in character. The aim seems to be the entire subversion of the moral faculty of the individual afflicted, and this is brought about by means so subtle and crafty that suspicions are scarcely ever aroused until it is too late, and until the will has already lost the power of resisting the promptings of the influence which is dominating it. Several instances of this kind, passing in diabolical cruelty all that the imagination can conceive, have come under the writer's personal notice. In one case it meant the utter and irretrievable moral ruin of the person concerned. In the other the effects can still be traced in the victim's shattered health and broken constitution.

The Roman Catholic Church is well ac-

quainted with occurrences of this kind, and it is not very long ago that a case in which exorcism was successfully used was reported in the "*St James' Gazette*." A vast field of research thus opens up before the view of the psychological student, and there can be little doubt that it will, in the course of time, yield valuable and unexpected results, and explain a thousand obscure phenomena which have hitherto baffled, and which still baffle, the student of nervous and mental disease.

But it is unnecessary to dwell on this subject at any fuller length. Sufficient has been said to show the trend of recent scientific thought on this subject, and to demonstrate how hopelessly modern liberal theology has gone astray. It is, unfortunately, not sufficiently well known that the age of the higher criticism is also the age of scientific spiritism, of the re-discovery of an unseen spiritual universe, and of the rehabilitation, on scientific grounds, of evil spirits and of haunting demons. And in the face of the evidence thus adduced, and of the

truths which modern research has so incontrovertibly and unexpectedly established, is it safe and scientific to deny the doctrine of Hell, and the existence of evil and of evil beings in the world beyond the grave?

THE END.

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